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How to build a perfect home on the Web

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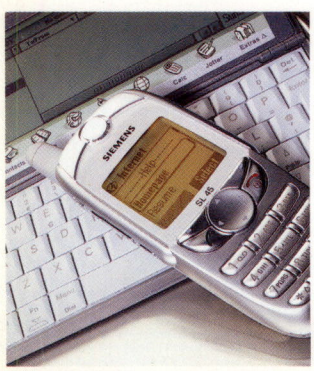

INTERNET IN YOUR POCKET
New palmtop browsers tested

WE NAME THE BEST ONLINE BOOK STORE

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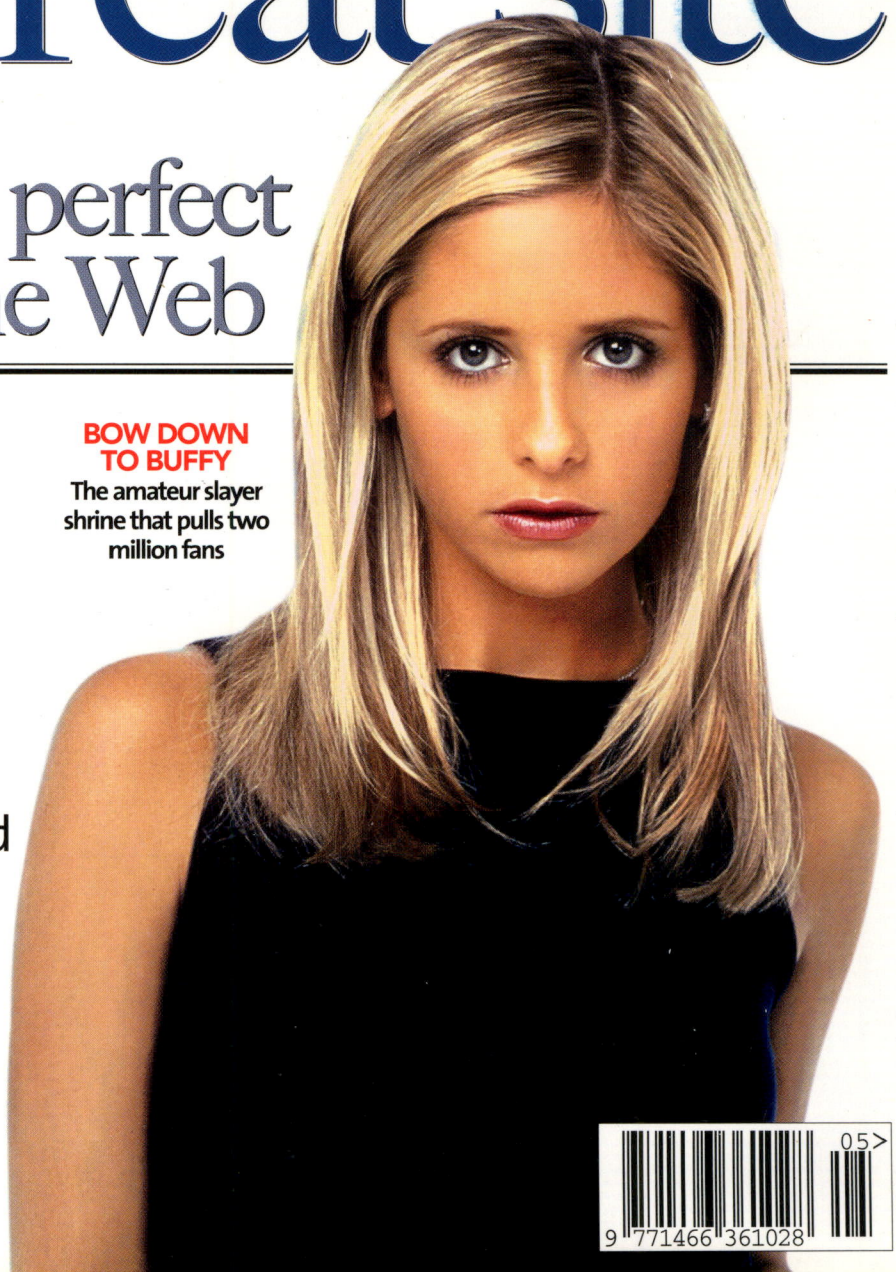

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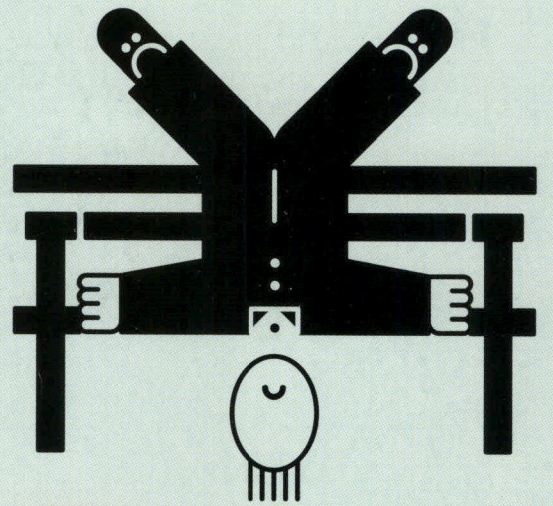

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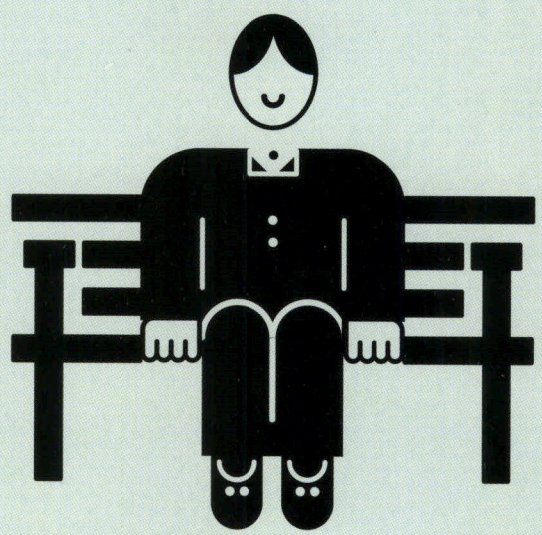

This is right. Well done.

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ESSENTIALS

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We're sworn to saving you time and money by bringing you the best of the Internet every month – and giving technical advice that will make mastering the Net cheaper and easier.

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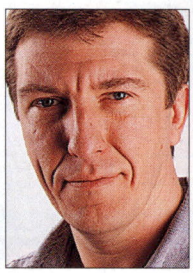
:-) ED'S COMMENT

From: your old friend Tony Subject: your voting intentions



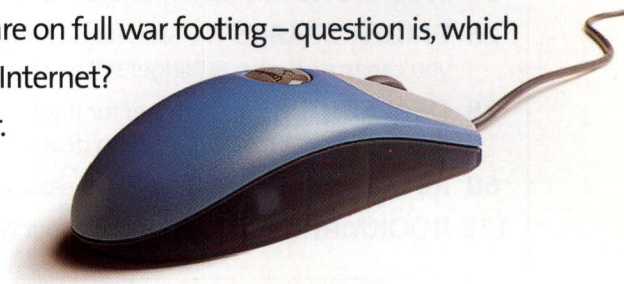
Got an email from William Hague the other day. Not that I count myself as anything special; thousands of Britons have found a missive from the ferocious little chap in their inboxes over recent weeks, complete with (in my case, at least) a .wav file attachment through which I could hear the Conservative supremo espouse his theories on the Euro.

I suppose I could waste time wondering where he had grabbed my email address from (Tory head office says that the mail went to 20,000 people who'd signed a petition to save the pound, a petition which I don't recall signing). But instead, I couldn't help but ponder on the power of the Internet as an electioneering tool.

Take the recent, prolonged battle between Bush and Gore for the world's hottest political pew. As the closeness of the call became evident, both men's campaign departments explained the curious nature of American Internet users. Although the majority were Republican, the demographic showed an extraordinary percentage of floating voters – 35 percent, to be precise. In other words, the Internet was emerging as the most direct way to access the voters who would sway the world's biggest election.

Within days, the Internet's pipework was packed with little notes from Al and George W, each side exploiting email's deceptively direct, personal way of speaking to prospective voters.

Fast forward a few months to now, and the upcoming Blair/Hague (oh, and Kennedy) scrap. As our man Chris Hadley has discovered in this issue, the major parties have learned from the American experience and are on full war footing – question is, which has a better handle on the Internet?
See page 50 for the answer.



Mark Payton, **EDITOR**
mark.payton@haynet.com

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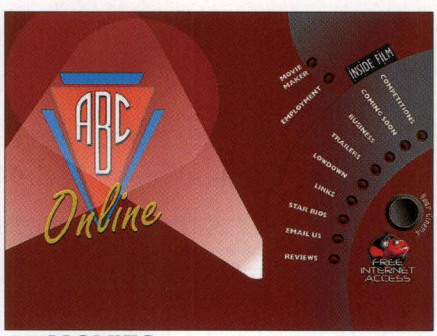

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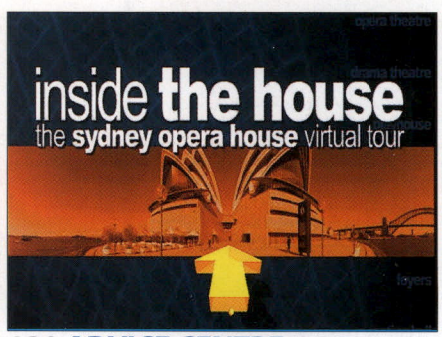

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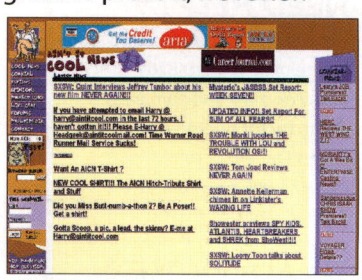

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Would you pay £60 a year to this man for MSN's site?

The UK's most popular site may soon start charging for access to 'certain areas'

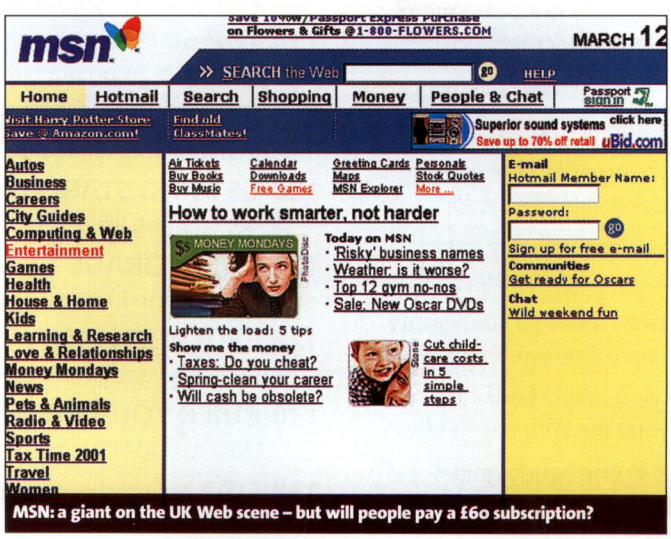
Bill Gates might be among the world's richest men, but that hasn't stopped Microsoft considering charging for services on their msn.co.uk portal.

The software and Web giant has confirmed it is looking into the possibility of asking users to cough up to access parts of its flagship British site – and charges are reported to be in the region of £60 per year. The cost would be levied for listening to live music on the site or accessing 'enhanced' gaming services.

'We remain committed to generating revenue from our existing model...from advertising, sponsorship and content distribution,' said an MSN spokesman.

MSN is the UK's most visited site, with 14 million visits per month, and among the top three sites worldwide. Gates has a personal fortune of $60 billion, and runs the most popular browser and operating system for PCs. The MSN UK site currently offers news, auctions, sport, dating and chat and is considered among the most professional and useable portals around.

The move comes as concerns are raised within the Web industry about the effectiveness of online advertising, with recent surveys having shown that banner ads on sites generate little revenue and are ignored by the overwhelming majority of surfers.



MSN: a giant on the UK Web scene – but will people pay a £60 subscription?

Sites which offer 'content' alone have no means of generating revenue unless they charge for what you read, a move which has divided experts: while shops can make money from the goods they sell, sites which rely on the number of hits they receive to attract advertisers are rapidly finding their profit margins falling as big spenders flock back to more traditional media.

Many industry analysts believe that if paying for access becomes an acceptable means of generating cash, users will become accustomed to doing so and the best of the charging sites will survive.

Others claim that, with much of the content available on the biggest Web sites also accessible through the printed media or television, users will balk at coughing up to use a site. MSN faces some stiff competition from the likes of American giants AOL (***www.aol.co.uk***) and home-grown Freeserve (***www.freeserve.net***) in the portal stakes.

'The charge will be levied for listening to live music'

The proposals had a decidedly lukewarm response from a small selection of surfers we surveyed, however. Few of them were seriously willing to consider paying for access, while some were positively vehement in their condemnation of Microsoft's plans.

'I don't have any real use for portals anyway,' one user told us. 'I haven't seen anything on MSN you can't get on just about any other portal you could name.'

'The thing is, they're just full of advertising,' commented another. 'And if MSN do start charging for it and no-one pays, they will soon change their mind – it's not really as if Microsoft are that hard up for a bob or two, is it?'

Others we spoke to said they were prepared to consider shelling out for 'really strong' content or extras, but unless MSN can provide something particularly spectacular to justify the costs – such as huge Web casts along the lines of their Madonna coverage from the Brixton Academy or big-name online chats – it seems that this idea might simply be a bit too far ahead of its time.

PICTURES: CORBIS, WTM PICTURES/ONLINE USA

BFWA: not coming in the air tonight

KNOWHOW THE INSTANT EXPERT GUIDE

No.20: Broadband fixed wireless access

What is it?

It's yet another form of broadband Internet access, this time promising down/upload speeds of at least 2MBps. Which is rather fast when compared to BTOpenworld's ADSL, which can crack along at 512kbps, and absolutely breakneck when compared to your home modem connection's 56.6kbps (read 33kbps in the real world). It works using radio waves: the data is transmitted through the air at 28GHz.

I want it. What's the catch?

Well, you'll soon be able to have it; assuming, of course, that you live in one of only seven of the 14 regions to have attracted bids when the Government auctioned off the licences last November, adding a measly £38.2m to the Treasury's coffers (they wanted £1bn). Only 16 of the 42 licences were sold, although now the Government has put the remaining licences up for offer again – at exactly the same reserve price that they first offered them for back in November. Which nobody bought into then...

Where do I have to live?

Consider yourself a lucky bunny if you're in Greater London, Greater Manchester, the West Midlands, Yorkshire, northern England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. If you're in Wales, East Anglia, the south coast or Derbyshire, you're in the 40 percent of the population for whom BFWA is a distant dream.

What next?

As of today, we're waiting for activity from the 'successful' auction bidders (we use the term advisedly – Energis bid £1m in Scotland, only to find that no-one had bid against them. We doubt they feel 'successful'), who will begin exploiting the business potential of BFWA (after all, it's a jolly quick way to squirt data around). Meanwhile, the 40 percent should get on to BT, ntl or Telewest – cable or ADSL might just be quicker.

Tearing your hair out?

the net helpline is available for all software, hardware, ISP and technical enquiries. Lines are open on Thursdays from 2pm to 5pm.

0208 267 5933

or email thenetnow@haynet.com

NEWS IN BRIEF

FIRST BYTES>>

> ISPS' ANGER IGNITES

UK telecom watchdog, Oftel, has been asked by ISPs Freeserve and AOL to consider new evidence against BT's handling of ADSL allocation, which has apparently slowed the rate of ADSL take-up in the UK. The ISPs claim that BT is displaying anti-competitive behaviour in that its wholesale arm, Ignite, favours BT's own broadband product, BTOpenworld, over all other ISP brands. At the time of writing, it was reported that BTOpenworld was installing up to 5,000 connections a week, compared to Freeserve and AOL's combined total of 200.

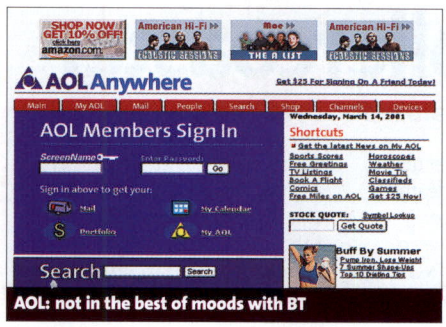
The tussle even found its way onto UK televisions, when AOL's Matt Peacock and BT's Steve Andrews exchanged words on BBC's consumer affairs programme *Watchdog*. Peacock insisted that BT's mission in life was to 'maintain a monopoly', while Andrews insisted that BT's allocation was 'absolutely fair'. An Oftel spokesperson did confirm that its investigation was being prolonged but declined to comment on the exact nature of the evidence.

> NET ROMANCE PUT ON ICE

A 27-year-old Yorkshire man has vowed never to go online again after his chat room romance turned into a gruesome nightmare. Young Trevor Tasker had been chatting to South Carolinian Wynema Shumante over the Net for months. After receiving a revealing photograph of the lithe lady, Tasker naturally decided to visit the States to be with her.

The first shock came at the airport, when he was greeted by a much older (the photo had been taken 30 years earlier) and heavier Shumante. Undeterred, good-natured Tasker decided to continue his holiday at Shumante's home. And that's when the police bust in...

Working on a tip-off, Charleston police searched Shumante's home and found the partly dismembered body of her 70-year-old roommate, James O'Neil, in the freezer. Apparently, O'Neil had died of natural causes a year earlier, but Shumante decided to hide the body so that she could continue to draw money from his account. 'She couldn't live without his income,' a police spokesman explained. Tasker took the next flight home and has apparently vowed not to venture online again.



AOL: not in the best of moods with BT

> PIZZA PAYS

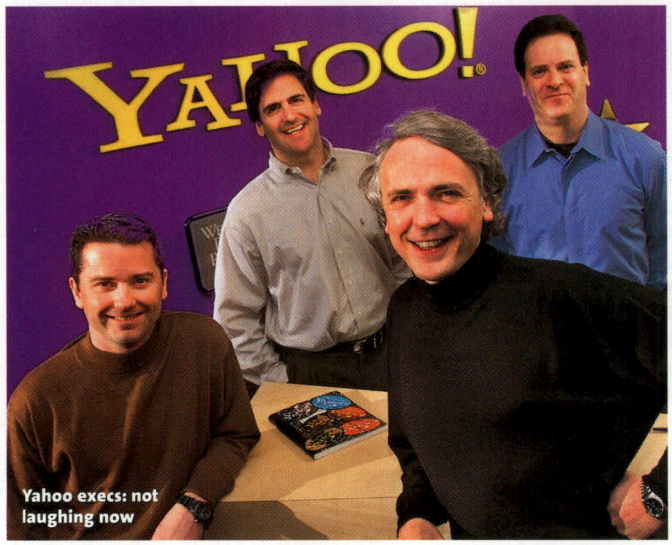
Pizza chain Domino's is enjoying record sales thanks to the popularity of its Net and interactive TV ordering service. It's estimated that the group take over £300k per month via these new services, and the profits look set to steadily rise.

It was only back in October 1998 that Domino's decided to give online ordering a go, starting in Milton Keynes. Of course, a little sponsorship deal with Sky involving Springfield's finest, *The Simpsons*, can't have hurt. Since the yellow fellas started advertising thin and cheesy crusts, brand awareness has increased by 13 percent.

Domino's: making a wedge from the Web

thenetnow»

:// All that's happening online



Yahoo execs: not laughing now

Riding the dot com rollercoaster

Ups and downs galore for the Web's wonderboys

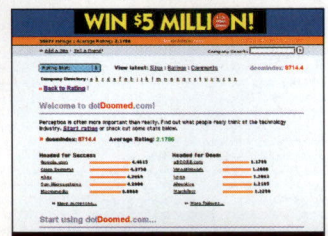
Life in dot com world is never dull – as a month of high-profile deaths and resurrections has proved.

It wasn't a great time to be an investor in Yahoo. The world's favourite directory saw its shares fall heavily before being suspended on NASDAQ, the US technology stock market. Yahoo! cut its revenue forecast for the first quarter of 2001 from $220 million to $170 million, and saw Tim Koogle step down as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), although he said he would remain as chairman of the company.

The portal blamed the economic downturn in the US for its woes, although commentators have pointed out that it highlights Yahoo's dependency on ads for its revenue.

Elsewhere, 'co-buying' site Letsbuyit.com appeared to dodge its much-publicised bankruptcy by the skin of its teeth after an eleventh-hour rescue package saved the outfit. It's now up and running again in the UK, Germany, France and Sweden following £53 million ($49.6 million) in fresh funding.

UK gaming site BarrysWorld.com,



DotDoomed: cruel, but fun

was saved after Electronics Boutique forked out £400,000 for the business. BarrysWorld ran out of cash after one of its investors decided enough was enough.

Toy shop eToys.com wasn't so lucky: it ran up debts reportedly to be as high as $274 million (£189m) before closing the doors.

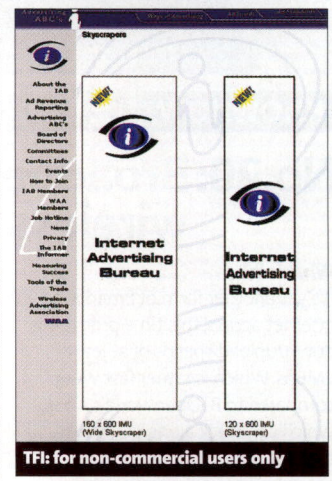
Of course, the dot com meltdown isn't bad news for everyone. Away from the gossip and rumour mongering, dotdoomed.com allows visitors to rate the chances of new economy businesses on a scale of one to five. It's a bit like the people-rating site amihotornot.com – but without the pictures...

Banner add even bigger

The UK's online advertisers are hoping a new 'skyscraper' will help sell their products and services.

But this isn't some kind of abseiling stunt down the world's largest building. Instead, it's one of a series of larger, flashier banner ads designed for companies keen to promote their wares online.

The Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB), one of the Net's leading online advertising associations with members including AOL and Yahoo!, has just issued guidelines for seven new ad shapes and their sizes. Called



TFI: for non-commercial users only

Interactive Marketing Units (IMUs), the new advertising formats consist of two vertical units ('skyscrapers') and five large rectangular units.

The new shapes don't replace the familiar banner ads. Instead, they simply give advertisers more scope and space in which to plug their products. It's hoped the new formats will give a shot in the arm to the online advertising industry which has seen revenues fall in the wake of research suggesting traditional banners are ineffective.

Hackers face jail terms under new law

Hackers caught breaking into key systems such as those used by hospitals and power companies could be prosecuted under new terrorist legislation introduced by the British Government.

The Terrorism Act 2000 (***www.hmso.gov.uk/acts/acts2000***) was introduced in February and broadens the definition of what a terrorist is to include cybercriminals who 'seriously...interfere with or seriously...disrupt an electronic system.' That means hackers and crackers are now branded terrorists.

However, not all hackers who breach security systems are covered by this new law. Those suspected must also have tried to 'influence the government or to intimidate the public' for the purpose of 'advancing a political, religious or ideological cause'.

Home Secretary Jack Straw claimed the new powers would enable the authorities to combat hi-tech crime more effectively. Officials hope the extended powers will also help deter would-be hackers from wreaking havoc.

WIRELESS WORLD» THE LATEST HANDS-FREE NEWS

TELLY ON THE MOVE
There's nothing more frustrating than making your way home after a hard day at work, only to find you haven't got access to accurate TV listings. Fret no more, as the excellent DigiGuide has transferred itself to WAP phones – logging on to wap.mydigiguide.com gives you access to all cable, satellite and terrestrial listing.

GOODBYE TO COINS
The 'cashless society' is one step closer to reality with the announcement of plans to allow mobile phone payment for parking meters and vending machines. Hi-tech pioneers Mint (*www.mint.nu*) are currently working on the new technology.

LOOKS LIKE RAIN...
Never be stuck for conversation again by accessing Met Office forecasts on your phone. Bulletins and long-term forecasts are available on SMS or WAP – visit *www.metoffice.gov.uk* to register.

TIKKA TO GO
In what must rank as the ultimate lager-drinking kebab-eater's dream, takeaway service Jamshoes has announced a WAP version of its extensive site, which currently has 30,000 fast food outlets and restaurants on its books. Thus visiting wap.jamshoes.com means you could have that cholesterol special waiting when you get home from the pub...

VisorPhone: one day, all phones will look like this

Handspring promises the whole web to go

Weary of needing both your mobile and PDA to access complete Web pages on the move? Prepare to spend – in just a few months, the Handspring VisorPhone launches in the UK, bringing together a PDA's large screen and GSM mobile connectivity.

For many Net users, the combination will offer the perfect solution, neatly sidestepping the screen limitations of mobile handsets while also negating the need for carrying both a mobile and PDA. At last, you'll have a phone that can browse the Web in all its glory, overshadowing the poor presentation of WAP. It's also a device that's purpose built for this year's GPRS (General Packet Radio Service) launch, which promises to boost mobile data transmission speeds.

The company has yet to announce UK prices, although the GSM springboard expansion module sells for $449 in the US (£290) today. Assuming that you don't own a Handspring PDA, you can then add a further £99 for a basic Visor (although given the built-in browser's Web capabilities, the combination only really comes to life if you invest in the £340 colour Prism).

However, it is believed Handspring is in negotiations with phone retailers such as Carphone Warehouse, with an eye to 'bundled' packages that reduce costs.

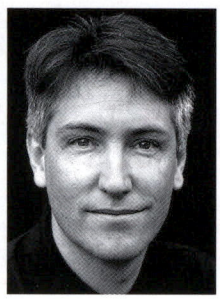
Once you've made the purchase, you'll have a dual band GSM phone with a full-spec Blazer Web browser and email client built in.

As could be expected, Handspring's rivals are unlikely to take the move lying down. As we went to press, rumours were rife of launches from Palm.

www.handspring.co.uk
www.ubinetics.com
www.palm.com/uk

Jon Casimir

OPINION **THE DEMISE OF THE ONLINE CUPPA**



A couple of issues ago, I wrote about the fact that in the midst of all these highly publicised dot com failures it was difficult to think of a site worth missing. Well, this month I've found one. And it is with no small sorrow that I put fingers to keyboard to eulogise a site that actually matters, a site that changed the Web, a site that made a profound contribution to the culture of the last decade.

Ladies and gentlemen, it's hats off and a respectful tug of the forelock as we watch the passing of ... The Trojan Room Coffee Machine site. Since 1993, this small, unassuming, wilfully under-designed effort (***www.cl.cam.ac.uk/coffee/coffee.html***) has done one simple thing and done it well. It has told a group of academics (and the breathlessly excited Web world) whether there's any coffee in the filter machine at Cambridge University's computer labs.

It began in 1991, when lab worker Quentin Stafford-Fraser realised his caffeine-dependent colleagues were constantly trekking up and down corridors and stairs, only to find that the filter machine was empty. The solution was simple.

We will be denied the reassurance that the lab staff are getting their java hit

The academics pointed a camera at the machine. The camera took pictures of the pot, which were displayed in a little window on the computers of everyone connected to the network. The image updated only three times a minute, but that was OK, Stafford-Fraser says, 'because the pot filled rather slowly'. It also worked only in black and white, which was OK too because, well, coffee ain't that colourful.

A couple of years later, the idea was transferred to the Web by Dan Gordon and Martyn Johnson. Since that time, it has attracted more than 2.4 million visitors. More importantly, though it's hard to be certain, it's generally agreed it was the first example of what we have come to know as the Webcam, the first time a Web site was used to show a self-updating image, an event just as important in Web terms as the first manned space flight.

The Trojan Room site is the spiritual godparent of every idiot who has voyeuristically pointed a lens at a workplace, a vista, an animal or himself. It helped usher in an era in which reality television makes a kind of sense. And for all that – well, you can choose your own anger or joy level.

Now, however, the computer lab is moving and the coffee cam (actually, there have been a few coffee machines, but they've looked the same, so no-one noticed) is being decommissioned. Very soon, we will all be denied the reassuring knowledge that the lab staff are getting their java hit each day. Such an important event shouldn't be allowed to go un-noticed.

And what I'm thinking is, despite the banality of the actual content, the historical significance of The Trojan Room Coffee Machine site should not be underestimated. Shouldn't there be an online equivalent of the National Trust to preserve places such as this?

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Librarians: wilful purveyors of porn?

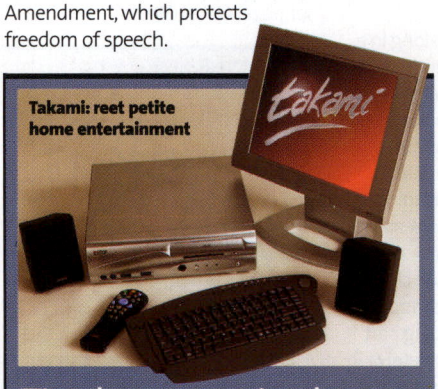
Nannied Net threat to libraries

The good news is that a library near you will soon be offering free Internet access. The bad news is that the information could be censored.

Scottish MPs demanded filtering software be incorporated into libraries' Net equipment after an outraged mother, whose eight-year-old daughter witnessed indecent images online at Castlemilk Library in Glasgow, took her story to the press.

Librarians, however, fear that censorship software would obstruct members of the public from carrying out legitimate research by, for example, barring entry to sites that include the word 'sex'.

In a similar case in America, a mother tried to sue a library, but the court ruled that censorship by the library could be a violation against the First Amendment, which protects freedom of speech.



Takami: reet petite home entertainment

Tiny by name, tiny by nature, tiny by pricetag

PC manufacturer Tiny takes the love affair between technology and minimalism a step further with the launch of the Tiny Takami. Encompassing TV, video, hi-fi with jukebox, CD and DVD players, Internet-ready PC, games console and MP3 player, all in one small shiny box, it will suit technophiles and *Wallpaper* adherents to a T. An entry-level Takami will set you back a mere £999 and includes wireless keyboard, remote control and speakers. To really impress your friends, though, you can upgrade with a 15" LCD screen, pushing the price tag up to £1,499. And if you're really trying to score with that significant other, we suggest you opt for the £6,999 version, which includes a 42" gas plasma screen and a DTS home theatre sound system.

PICTURES: CORBIS

Tim Richardson

OPINION WHO WANTS A WIRELESS WORLD?

The future's bright, apparently. And the boffins at Orange are trying to ensure it gets even brighter.

In the dark days of February they cut the ribbon on a £2 million detached house in Hertfordshire that has been 're-designed and re-configured to integrate a range of advanced services, which can be controlled using wirefree technology'.

This is the Internet without wires and cables. Instead of accessing Web sites and sending email, the Orange house lets the inhabitants flick the lights on and off, run a bath, pop the heating on and draw the curtains, all from the comfort of their own mobile phone. The whole house is wired so that everyday tasks can be done remotely and on the move through a powerful wireless network.

Mobile phone conversations will never be the same again: 'Kettle on. Iron off. Toilet flush...'

Furthermore, all this can be done not by pressing buttons, but by talking. Orange's house of the future can be controlled using simple voice commands. Mobile phone conversations will never be the same again: 'Kettle on. Iron off. Toilet flush...'

According to the boffins: 'The house serves as a test-bed for demonstrating Orange's vision of a world where communication and access to information is simple, human and intuitive, expounds the brochure. In this world, your Orange phone becomes your "remote control" for all your needs, whether at home or at work.'

Well that's fine too. Except, what happens if you can't get a signal? Or worse, the phone is only working intermittently? Fine, you turn the taps on so that you can have a nice soak when you get home but find you can't turn them off because the network's mysteriously gone down.

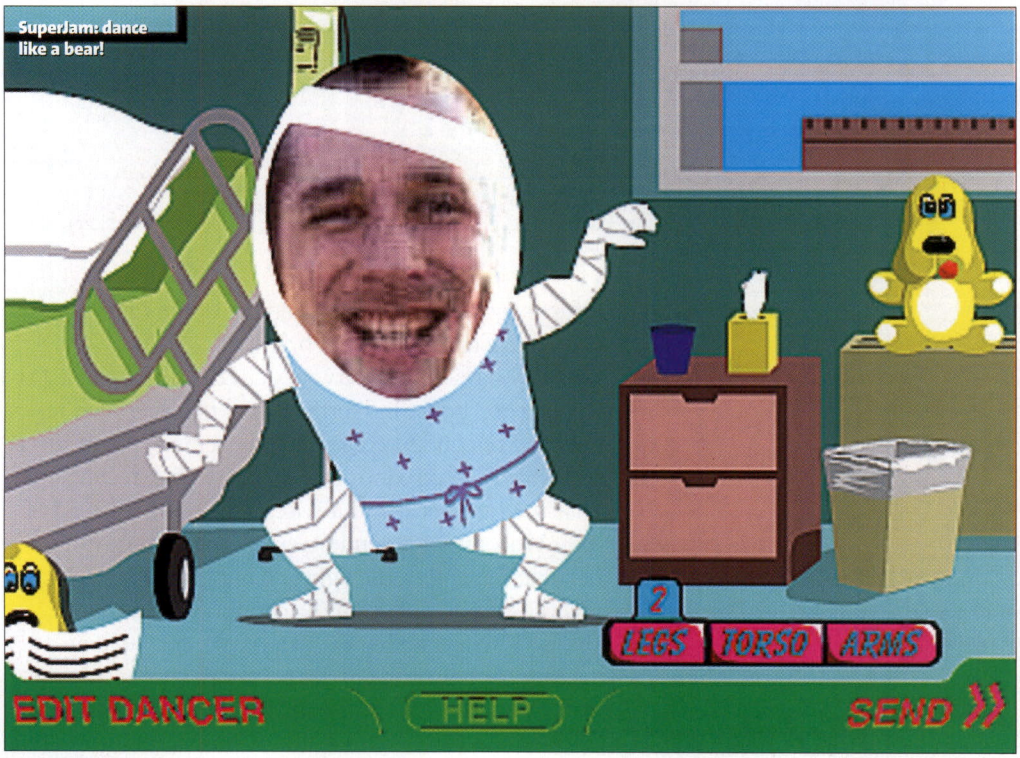
You rush home to do it manually but can't open your front door; not because you've lost your key but because your phone battery is dead and you can't operate the house's electronic security system. Oh, and you can't break in because the security robot that patrols the house while you're away is armed to the teeth and will zap anyone if not deactivated first.

Okay, so it's easy to knock this kind of techno-social experiment. But there's good reason. Technology companies are forever trying to come up with different, sometimes ingenious, ways of getting us to use their products. But while they're trying to stimulate new demand, there is a danger that they can leave people behind.

During the great technology hype of the last five years Net companies promised we'd be doing just about everything online, from shopping and ordering pizza to watching TV and voting. These things are all possible, but they're certainly not mainstream, not yet anyway. These aspirations have yet to be realised and I guess the same will be said about the Orange house. The future might be bright – but it's also a long way off.

thenetnow»

://Heroes & Zeros – the best and the worst of the Web



SuperJam: dance like a bear!

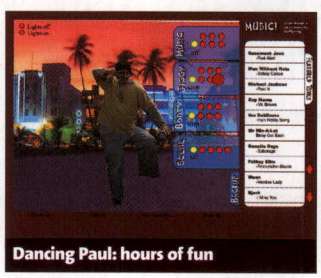
HERO BEST IDEA

Rockin' all over the Web

FORGET SUPER-SWISH PORTALS OR well-stocked stores – it seems all we want from the Web is dancing.

This month's biggest craze comes courtesy of Superjam (***www.super-jam.com***), who are currently featuring a nifty little service which lets you email a personalised dancing figure to friends and family.

All you need is a scanned snap of yourself, which you upload to one of the dancing figures, before setting the legs, torso and arms to move in a variety of erratic ways. Laugh as your figure breakdances while waving its arm frantically! Amaze friends with the funky chicken!


Dancing Paul: hours of fun

Thrusting and grinding along in a similar vein is Dancing Paul (***www.dancingpaul.com***), which has been doing the rounds among bored office workers. Here you can set a suitably scallyish-looking figure to gyrate to popular tunes, including Fatboy Slim's *Rockafeller skank* and *Superfly* by Curtis Mayfield.

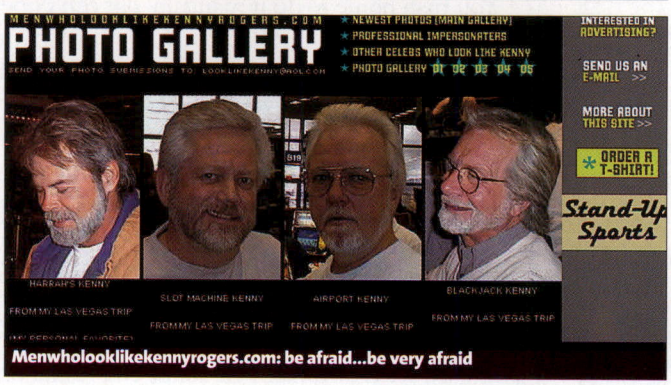
The real winner here is the chance to change backgrounds and introduce several similarly loony dancing partners. Utterly pointless, completely disposable – but great fun with it.

HERO WEIRDEST PEOPLE

Revenge of the beards

'HAVE YOU NOTICED THAT A LOT OF men over a certain age look a lot like country music superstar Kenny Rogers?' Can't say we had, but the brains behind ***www.menwholook-likekennyrogers.com*** certainly have.

In fact, they've set up a site dedicated to the silver-bearded lookalikes, featuring five photo galleries of ageing would-be crooners and suggestions for celebrity Kennys including Jesus, George Lucas and Ken Bates.



Menwholooklikekennyrogers.com: be afraid...be very afraid

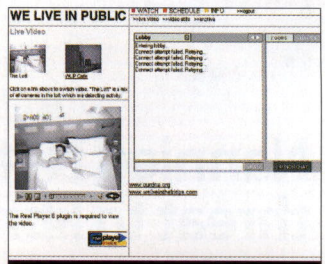
Even more laudable is a section entitled 'How To Look like Kenny', complete with grooming and styling tips. 'Once I noticed the phenomenon, there was no escaping it,' says Web master Jamie Muelhausen. 'Basically, it's these guys who reach a certain age and they decide to grow a beard. They are from an era where you wore your hair a little longer. When you combine the two, they end up looking like Kenny Rogers.'

ZERO SILLIEST IDEA

Public life is rubbish

WHEN WILL THE GOOD CITIZENS OF Netville learn that dabbling with Webcams always ends in tears? Sure, Jennicam (***www.jennicam.org***) may have made a mint from broadcasting her life to the Web, but elsewhere lie tales of shattered dreams and exposed privates.

Latest to suffer is Josh Harris, a former dot com millionaire who retired from Silicon Valley to set up a specially-modified flat in which both he and his girlfriend would live in front of the unforgiving lens at ***www.weliveinpublic.com***. So high-tech was this venture that heat-seeking cameras even followed Harris and Tanya Corrin around the flat, while Web chatters' comments were broadcast to them on screens.



Weliveinpublic: dot com flop

Just one snag, however – Tanya didn't stick around, tiring quickly of being watched in the shower. Which leaves just Josh. Eating lots of pizza. Alone. Great.

HERO BEST NEWS

Google makes its UK entrance

You probably didn't notice – there certainly wasn't any fanfare to herald it – but the much-lauded Google has launched a UK-only service at ***www.google.co.uk***.

Since launching with a similar low profile in 1998, the US-run search engine has become incredibly popular with clued-up surfers for its minimalist fuss-free design and the startling accuracy of its results. The UK service searches British sites only, but otherwise looks and works exactly like the original.

It's not all good news in Google world, however: rival search engine AltaVista has filed patents on its indexing and spidering software, which it claims is the first of its kind on the Web and has been widely copied by every search engine ever since. If AltaVista was successful in trademarking the systems, it would effectively become the only recognised search engine online. Expect a ruling soon...

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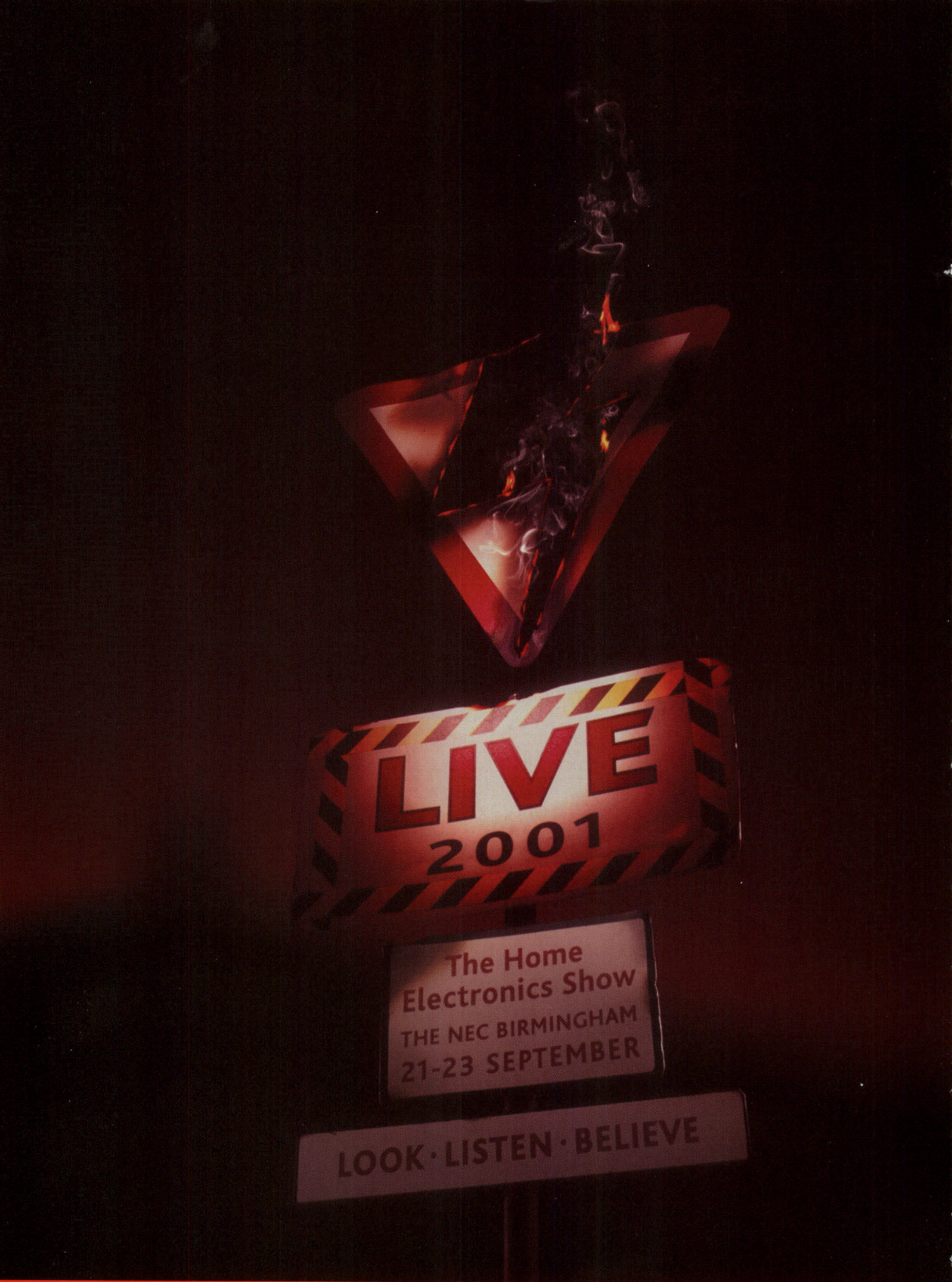

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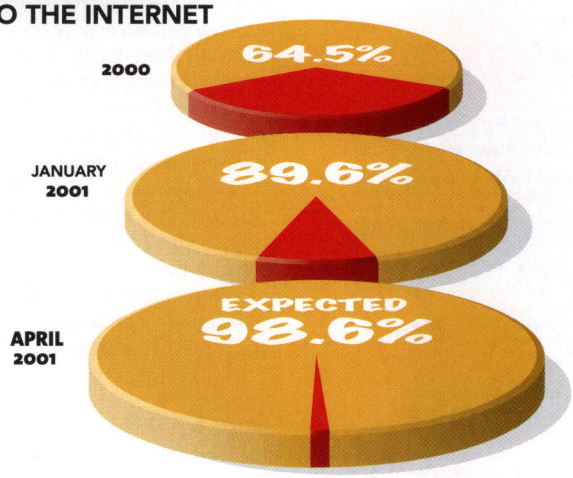
Statattack»

:// The Web in charts and graphs

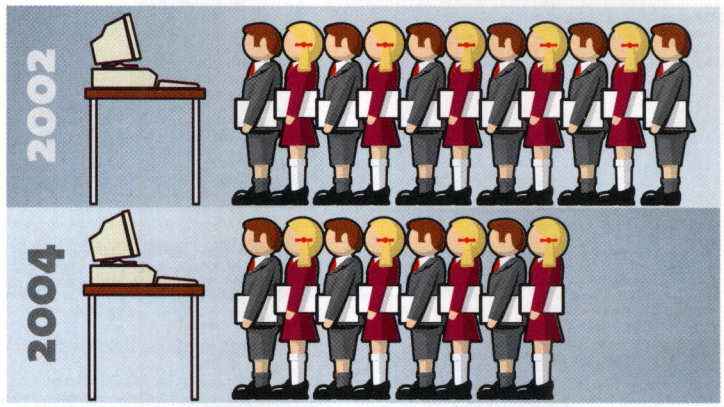
'What did you do at school today, Johnny?'

The kids, it seems, are alright. Only last year, nearly two thirds (64.5 per-cent) of state schools boasted a Net connection; this year, that has risen to 89.6 percent. And if a Government report from a few months back is to be believed, it'll hurtle to 98.6 percent by April 2001 – which is now. All very edifying, we're sure, particularly with an election looming large – but we bet 'wired' means one ancient PC per school. Not so, say the official figures: the average school has 16.3 computers, compared to 12.6 last year. And if this picture isn't rosy enough, some of the brats even have ISDN connections. The odd figure out? Nine percent of the wired schools do not let the children use the Internet. That'll be old Mr Roberts buffing up on human biology again in private, then...

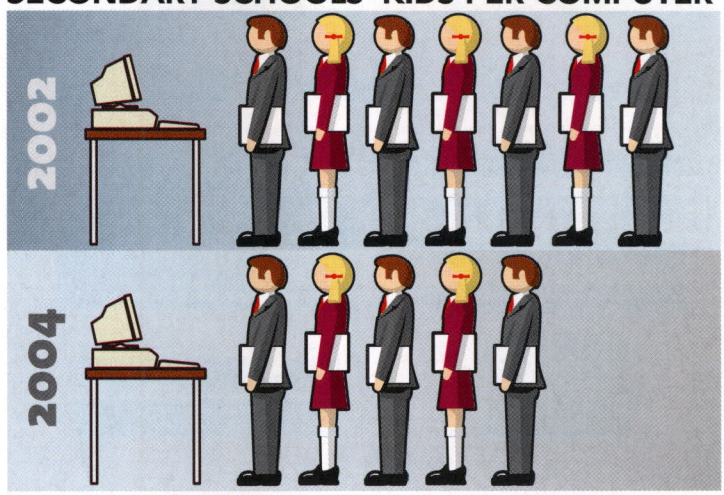
PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOLS CONNECTED TO THE INTERNET



PRIMARY SCHOOLS - KIDS PER COMPUTER



SECONDARY SCHOOLS - KIDS PER COMPUTER

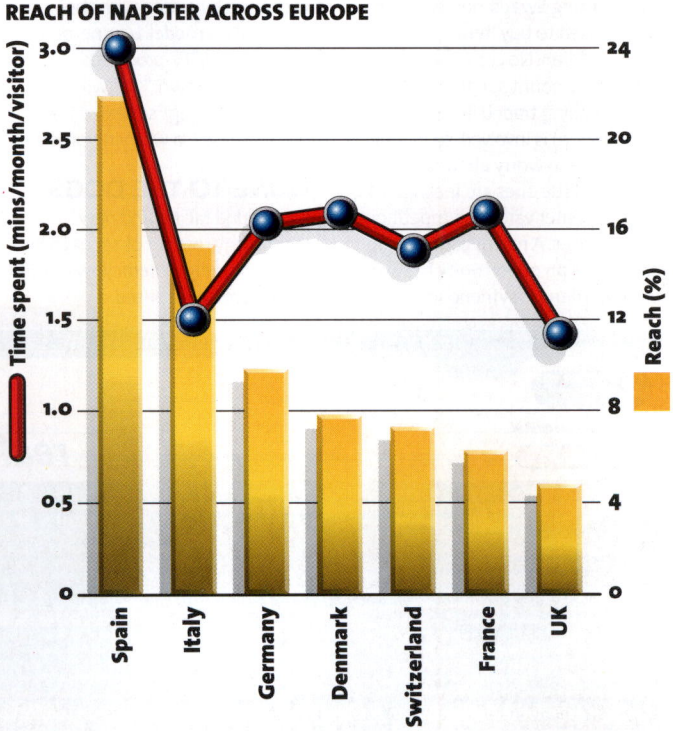


Spanish pirates take to the Internet high seas

The Napsterite. A furtive, anxious breed of human now threatened with extinction. By day, he occupies perfectly mundane working roles in offices the length and breadth of Europe. But by night, he's NapsterMan, borrower of music and defender of the downloader's faith. Why pay, is his rallying cry, when you can borrow and burn to CD-R? Quite right, NapsterMan. Or perhaps it should be NapsterWoman: according to latest research from Jupiter MMXI, 23 percent of the service's users are female. You want more of a profile of the breed? OK – Jupiter says 50 per-cent are under 24 years old. And in a survey by the organisation of Napster use across seven key European countries, the Spanish emerged as a nation with more than its fair share of Napsterites (which is odd – you would have thought that the warmer the country, the more likely people would be to indulge in other 'normal' activities such as, well, going out).

www.glreach.com/globstats

REACH OF NAPSTER ACROSS EUROPE



ILLUSTRATIONS: ALAN ELDRIDGE

QUICK FIGURES

YOU'LL NEVER BELIEVE IT...»

■ Is the CD dead? According to new research from Mori, over a third of all people aged between 15 and 24 think they'll stop buy-ing compact discs within five years. Meanwhile, the same sur-vey revealed that 33 percent of Internet users can see a time when all their music is kept on a pocket-sized portable device.

■ **Since the end of 1999, Virgin Radio's online audience has grown by 40 percent. It has even been named the highest-ranking music station in the prestigious Arbitron Infostream internet radio ratings.**

■ Revolution? What revolution? According to a new survey from the CBI, around three-quarters of UK firms generate under five percent of their sales from ebusiness. That said, 99 percent still reckon it will be a big influ-ence on their future sales.

:// NEW SITES

All change for online swappers

Swapitshop.co.uk: a fertile breeding ground for the investment bankers of the future?

REVIEWED

SWAPITSHOP
www.swapitshop.co.uk

GUARDIAN UNLIMITED TRAVEL
travel.guardian.co.uk

BBC HOLIDAY
www.holiday.beeb.com

24 DOGS
www.24dogs.com

LIVERPOOL FC
www.liverpoolfc.tv

SPROGS' SWAP SHOP

Is banking the new kids' craze?' asks SwapitShop's publicist, Brett Gregory-Peake. For their sake, let's hope not. But there's no denying children are more technologically advanced than those of us born a decade earlier; and now, at SwapitShop (***www.swapitshop.co.uk***), youngsters are 'learning the value of currency and how to use it...'

The premise, along with the site's layout, is easy: kids post items that they'd like to swap (such as an old video game they're tired of, etc), thus earning Swapit points which can be used to buy items posted by other children. No currency (aside from the amount spent on postage when mailing traded items to SwapitShop) is involved, so parents don't have to worry about debts.

If your little ones are feeling lucky, they can enter various competitions to win prizes. A recent competition gave users an opportunity to swap their girlfriend/boyfriend in exchange for a date with the SwapitShop model, Leanne, or a member of MTV-processed boy-band, O Town. 'Kids will swap almost anything!' squealed the press release – a worrying prospect...

GONE TO THE DOGS

Greyhound racing and new technology might not seem to be the most likely of bedfellows – but prepare to be surprised.

Giving us paws for thought this month is the newly-launched and rather slick ***www.24dogs.com***, which claims to be the 'world's first fully-integrated greyhound information and betting site that lets fans place bets online'.

It seems dogs are back in fashion big time, with cheap admission prices (and inexpensive beer) bringing the crowds flocking back, along with the likes of Chris Evans, Jamie Oliver and the celeb crowd.

24 Dogs, owned by Wembley, is the portal such hip young things have been waiting for, with a service just as thorough as any of the big horse racing sites. We were particularly impressed by the daily round-up of newspaper selections; the site's own tipster has a place in the *Guinness Book Of Records* after successfully predicting the outcome of 12 successive races.

And, of course, there's the betting itself, a suitably smooth service bringing together races from across the country with full race cards and details. With foot and mouth putting paid to the nags, why not try the dogs instead?

HAVE MERSEY ON THEM

For a club that has such a rich footballing heritage, Liverpool have always been surprisingly behind-the-times when it comes to the Web. Not any more.

The club's bog-standard official site (***www.liverpoolfc.net***) was a late launch, and nothing much to write home about, but the brand-spanking new ***www.liverpoolfc.tv***, which goes live at the start of April, is a different matter entirely. From the sneak previews we've had, the Reds are entering a whole new ball game.

The most exciting prospect on offer is an entire TV section offering goals and highlights from European

24 Dogs: experience the thrill of an evening at the dogs from the safety and comfort of your own front room

Project Gotham: ridiculously realistic

Make way for virtual planes, trains and automobiles

REVIEWED
HALO
halo.bungie.com
WORMS WORLD PARTY
us.infogrames.com
TRAIN SIMULATOR
www.microsoft.com/games/trainsim

THE XBOX COMETH

The gloves are well and truly off in the war of the broadband-ready next generation consoles. Microsoft finally made a showing of first-party Xbox titles in Seattle on 13 March, and from the looks of this lot, online gaming is about to hit the living room big leagues.

Picks of the bunch were *Halo*, Bungie's online multiplayer sci-fi shooter (***halo.bungie.com***) and *Project Gotham*, the Bizarre Creations-developed city car speed-fest based on the technology of Dreamcast's visual tour de force, *Metropolis Street Racer*. *Halo's* setting of planet-sized rings dripping with malicious aliens, souped up human troopers and enough polygons to make a grown man weep should be more than enough to kick start Xbox's broadband push when the console is released early next year in Europe. *Project Gotham* looks nothing short of ridiculously realistic, and, to the relief of petrol-heads the world over, promises full online play through your TV. Gentlemen, as ever, start your engines.

A heavy focus, unsurprisingly, was played on online functionality for Microsoft's new breed of potential PlayStation 2-beating projects. The new version of Microsoft *Flight Simulator*, for example, will now feature additional traffic in the sky and force pilots to check with airport towers whether or not it's safe to land.

Halo: sure to kick-start Xbox's online gaming capabilities

WORMING TO MULTIPLAYER SUCCESS

Worms. Not the kind you have to risk losing your fingers to rid your cat of, but heavily armed invertebrates hellbent on sending you to slimy hell. This is one of the greatest multiplayer series of all time, and the latest version, *Worms World Party* (***us.infogrames.com***), brings more features and weapons to PC and Dreamcast play.

Players take on teams of up to six cartoon worms and take it in turns to chuck exploding sheep, holy hand grenades, old women and highly charged Salvation Army officers at each other over the Internet or a LAN. Be warned: this may sound like childish fun, but ranks in the Super Addictive category. Get it now.

AND FINALLY...

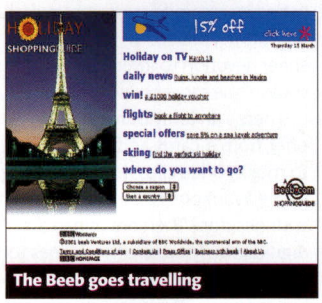
Microsoft may have some killer Xbox titles, but *Train Simulator* (***www.microsoft.com/games/trainsim***) casts more than a little doubt over whether or not something is rotten in the core of its game division. Dubbed as being 'as real as it gets', this tragic piece of software allows players to drive pretty much every train in existence. The Internet has a part to play, giving über-geeks the opportunity to create their own scenery, trains and routes and distribute them to fellow drivers. Online play has been sadly omitted: can you imagine the joy of passing another 'player' on a train going in the other direction?

and reserve games (sadly, the Premiership is still the domain of Sky), plus interviews and specially-made programmes. Which is a lot like Manchester United's MUTV, except you don't have to own a dish and it doesn't cost a penny.

And there's more: live press conferences, online ticket sales, updated news, a Web cam and a post-match email from manager Gerard Houllier with his views on the game. United might lead the way on the field for now, but cyberspace belongs to the Scousers. One day, every football site will be this slick.

GOOD GUIDES BY OLD FRIENDS

Right now, everyone is itching for that big break in their year, somewhere between Christmas and rain-filled March. If you're still unsure about where to go, Guardian Unlimited's travel guide, at ***travel.guardian.co.uk***, and the BBC's Holiday home on the Net, at ***www.holiday.beeb.com***, are recommended surfing. Which one you choose to visit is really down to aesthetic preference. While the former site is all wordy and wise, the Beeb



The Beeb goes travelling

concentrates on getting you the information you'll need without an extraordinary amount of flair.

High points of Guardian Unlimited's site include an eco-friendly section for anyone interested in saving the world as they catch some rays. There's also a must-see article featuring Europe's top 50 hotels; great for a weekender. And we like the Netjetters section, where a host of 'interactive travellers' relay their holiday experiences through journals and audio clips.

The Beeb's site, meanwhile, has a handy checklist, as well as an option to buy books and holiday accessories through various links. Fans of the *Holiday* programme on BBC1 will appreciate the online summary of where Angela Rippon et al travelled to in previous weeks.

:// MOVIES

Lopez in online marriage shocker

REVIEWED
The Wedding Planner
www.wedding-planner-movie.com
www.spe.sony.com/movies/weddingplanner
Spy Kids
www.spykids.com
Rugrats in Paris
www.nick.com/go/movies_rugrats_paris

The Wedding Planner: **Two sites that really ought to talk to each other...**

Spy Kids: **log on, get to play with the Super Guppy sub. Believe us, it's fun**

WEDDING PLANNER

Both the studio (Sony) and the film's production company (Intermedia) have built sites profiling *The Wedding Planner*, an enjoyable romantic comedy of errors featuring Jennifer Lopez and Matthew McConaughey.

Yet while most film sites have the same content in standard HTML and Flash formats, with the latter blessed with a few more interactive goodies, Intermedia's full-on Flash site is light on actual film info, while Sony's has great background info, plus four Flash animation episodes.

Intermedia's Flash site features a wealth of downloadables, although offering a mammoth 33.1 Mb Quicktime trailer is ludicrous. Also on offer is a fair gallery and mildly diverting pop quiz about movie weddings. The four wallpapers are attractive enough, more aimed at McConaughey's fans than Lopez's 'ardent' admirers, who won't get the shots they really want. And the simple interface, while easy on the eye, is technically quite hampering (the Shockwave chat room stalls with a script error).

The lack of information is made up for on the Sony site, with in-depth coverage of cast and crew, including production notes and interviews. The site's four Shockwave cartoons are entertaining in a Blatant Market Research kind of way, but will be unlikely to crash your machine. Of the two, Sony's is the better deal, with trailers and galleries all present. Why they aren't rolled into one is bewildering, but the result is satisfying nonetheless.

SPY KIDS

After shining at frenetic bullet-fests and two-handed gunplay with the likes of *From Dusk till Dawn*, Robert Rodriguez has now turned his hand to *Spy Kids*, a (deep breath) children's action-comedy-adventure.

Having retired from their life as super-spies, husband and wife team Antonio Banderas and Carla Guigino now have a cosy family life. When their past catches up and they're kidnapped, it's up to their brats to save the day, Bond-style.

The official site is colourful, with lots of bright red and yellow, but while information about the film is competent it's hardly interesting. The screen saver is good-looking, but given the film's theme, you'd think they could have come up with cooler wallpapers than the uninspired marketing dross here.

However, the four spy missions, in which you must evade all manner of danger, aided by such gadgets as the Super Guppy sub (really) are fun. The games are easy, but the performance will struggle on slower machines. Be warned, though; even through a very fast connection, the site was still clunky. But if you're patient (and really want to infiltrate Castle Floop and save the day), *Spy Kids* will amuse young and old alike.

RUGRATS IN PARIS

When it comes to kids cartoons, *Pokemon* may be indecipherable nonsense but, for some strange reason, *Rugrats* remains a guilty pleasure, mixing as it does the goofy, charming naïveté of *Peanuts* with stuff that media-hip adults can enjoy. This month sees the release of their second feature, which relocates the little darlings to Paris. It won't win any Oscars, but it could show the big boys how to make a Web site for this is a perfectly aimed effort that knows exactly what the audience wants. In this case: games. Loads of 'em, and more besides.

With a simple interface and a sensible amount of Shockwave, the site won't be off-limits to many computers. What written content there is (the character bios, split between 'Kids' and 'Grown-Ups') is endearingly written in Rugrat-speak, yet never coming across as mawkish. Rugrats in Paris scores highly for a sheer devotion to interactivity that couldn't be more child-friendly.

There's an array of features on offer, from e-cards and screensavers, to music/video clips and a colouring game. Want one of the blighters on your desktop? Then download a digi-Rugrat. There are five games to choose from, like the poignant 'Create a new Mom for Chuckie' and the wacky 'Escape from Ooey-Gooey World'. For sheer child-diversion value, this is unbeatable and a fine example of a site made with care, attention and a real sense of fun.

DOT COM DUFFER OF THE MONTH:

Saving Silverman
www.spe.sony.com/movies/savingsilverman

This latest dumb teen comedy's site promises a glimpse into film making with Dennis Dugan, 'director of the comedy classic *Big Daddy*'. Which made us wonder: who wants to know how to make a dud flick? Sure, the bios, downloads and interviews are there, and you get a layman's view of filming. However, the site is rife with Dugan's embarrassing 'geeky Dad' attempts at ker-azy wackiness. This is made worse by Dugan's annoyingly pedestrian film making advice. Avoid.

:// MUSIC

Want to see our site? Buy the album first...

REVIEWED
Daft Punk
www.daftclub.com
Air
airfrenchband.co.uk
Gorillaz
www.gorillaz.com

NOT SO DAFT PUNK

Not content with world domination in sport – well, football, but then there really is no other sport – France has moved its attention to music.

First up are Daft Punk. *Discovery*, the duo's second album following the two million-selling *Homework*, was released mid-March and greeted with almost uncontrollable whooping and a-hollering from the music press. It even led the usually reticent *Q* to enthuse: 'Someday, all dance albums will be made like this'. And all with reason. It's a good album, maybe touching on greatness, full of the sort of urbane wit, tuneage and curious disco iconography that perhaps only continental Europeans can produce.

On this latest project the faceless duo of Thomas Bangalter and Guy-Manuel De Homem Christo (no, I've no idea if those are their real names either) have dispensed with their masks and morphed into robots. And like all good robots, they are committed to new technologies.

In the same way that über-dance duo Underworld repaid fans last year who bought their DVD, Daft Punk have established Daftclub.com for all those who buy *Discovery*. In each album sleeve there is a card with a unique personal access code. Go to the site, type in your code and a world of online Daft Punk booty is yours. Throughout the coming months new tracks, video clips, various pieces of artwork and whatever else Daft Punk decide to spew from their mainframe will appear. As the pair have said they intend to stop touring for at least 12 months to concentrate on the site, it could be a little special. At present, it's only available for those with PCs, but a Mac version is imminent.

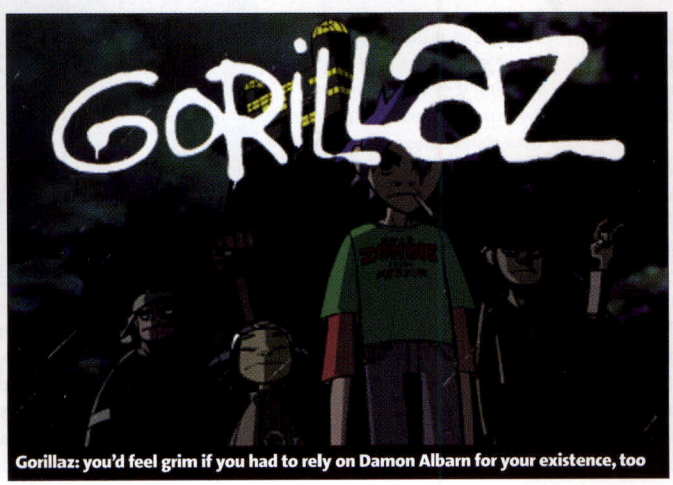
To keep you going, there's always the ***www.daftpunknet.multimania.com*** raft of fan sites, which before too long will probably have found a means into Daftclub.com without buying the album.

SOMETHING IN THE AIR

If Daft Punk chart the amyl nitrate Saturday night rush, their Parisian chums Air soundtrack the 4am Gauloise comedown.

Air return on 28 May with *10, 000Hz*, their third album. Following their 1998 breakthrough with the gloriously languid *Moon Safari* and *Premiers Symptomes* – the soundtrack to the Sofia Coppola-directed *Virgin Suicides* of last year – it may leave a few fans wondering just what is going on. In place of their distinctive Bacharachian and Brian Wilson flourishes lurks a dark centre. Looking towards late-60s experimental producer and wringer of spiritual noises, David Axelrod, as well as, oddly, 10cc, it has something of a prog feel. It still gleams like a freshly waxed classic car, but then no less would be expected of Jean-Benoit Dunckel and Nicolas Godin.

Sadly, the pair lack Daft Punk's love of the Internet. Early review copies of the album featured mid-song dips and early fade-outs to prevent nasty folk uploading them. And their presence online is paltry. Best of a bad load is ***airfrenchband.co.uk***. Though a fan-site, it is a good fan site and as the album launch approaches it will provide directions for finding those songs not destroyed by random fades.



Gorillaz: you'd feel grim if you had to rely on Damon Albarn for your existence, too

GORILLAZ ARE GO

Gorillaz are the world's first fully interactive cartoon band. Made up of Murdoc, 2-D, Noodle and Russel, they released their self-titled debut in March. It was a patchy affair, full of unrealised stabs at deep dub and wannabe New York hip-hop. Still, it did spawn a top 10 hit with *Clint Eastwood*.

Being cartoons an' all, Gorillaz have difficulty playing instruments, writing songs and generally existing so they need corporeal guides (this is turning into a Greek tragedy, but stay with it). Their guides are, essentially, producer and remix bod Dan the Automator and Damon Albarn. And though Gorillaz are by no means French, Albarn did once sing a Blur song in the Gallic tongue.

That all said, they are worthy of mention here because of their quite fantastic site. Gorillaz.com is everything a band site should be. Though it takes a little time to work out just what's going on, it allows you to trawl through the band's virtual house (being a virtual band this, then, is their real house), play around with their things, spray on walls, watch videos, listen to audios and discover hidden tracks and new elements that appear almost every time you visit. It will be continually updated and if the band stays about for longer than one album, will build up into an incredible bank.

WORDS: PATRICK GARRATT (GAMES); DECLAN ALBISTON (MUSIC); DANNY GRAYDON (MOVIES)

COMPUTERS JAMES SNODGRASS

You've got (dangerous) mail

VIRUSES ARE FOR OTHER PEOPLE; they don't hit techno junkies like me. I would never be so stupid as to leave my system open to attack from geeks. Besides, you'd never find me opening attachments labelled AnnaKournikova.jpg or believing I'd won a prize, click here if you please. Little did I know an anti-virus site would save my working life.

A few weeks ago a friend sent me an email. 'Just thought I'd point out,' said his email, 'that every time you email me, I get two emails from you.' I felt a bit smug. Obviously, I replied, you have set your email client so that it only displays emails in plain text format. The attached file, I suggested, was actually my email in HTML code.

The same day I got a call from my brother, a freelance Web developer. 'James,' said my bro, 'that second email you sent me, the one without a subject header...'

An email without a subject header? I always use subject headers. I looked through my Sent Items box. As I guessed, I hadn't sent any emails without a subject header.

'I think it's a virus,' continued Snod Junior, 'it keeps dialling up to the Internet every time I boot up and it's destroying files on my desktop one by one.'

Funny that. My computer kept dialling up to the Internet every time I booted up and many more times besides. In fact it seemed to dial the Internet every time I played that 'just one more time and I'll get back to work' game of solitaire, every time I opened certain applications and when I opened the CD drive.

I'd also noticed that a few files, mostly Flash animations I had downloaded from the Web, were being erased. Oh yes, and my Handspring Visor wouldn't synch with Palm Desktop. And wasn't I having a problem with my Zip drive?

I checked through my Inbox for the third or fourth time and couldn't find any attachments that might possibly have contained viruses.

'I don't understand,' I explained to my girlfriend, 'I never open attached files unless I know what they are.' My girlfriend looked reticent. Oh dear. She'd been sent an email by her employer without a subject heading. Contained within the email was 'READERS_DIGEST_LETTER.TXT.pif'. I was infected.

I rebooted the system, which taunted me with: 'Your virus protection descriptions are more than five months old. New viruses are created all the time. You are advised to keep your virus protection up to date.'

I got my McAfee virus protection software to update itself via the Internet, but it couldn't locate the server. So instead I went to the McAfee site (***www.mcafee.com***) to download a patch but, every time I did so, Internet Explorer would perform an illegal operation and shut down. The same thing happened when I tried to visit other virus protection sites.

Finally I made it to an Internet café and typed 'READERS_DIGEST_LETTER.TXT.pif' into the Google search engine (***www.google.com***). This took me to the various anti-virus sites denied to me by my PC. On the site of Trend (***www.trend.com***), makers of PC-Cillin virus protection software, I found a description of my nemesis, the MTX supervirus.

According to the Trend site the virus replicates itself by invisibly sending emails to all people you email and that, while not virulent enough to destroy your entire hard drive, it leaves your hard drive open to hackers every time you connect to the Internet and (nasty, this bit) blocks access to anti-virus sites. I printed Trend's detailed disinfection procedures and burned a CD of PC-Cillin. Lo and behold, when I installed it, I found my system was host to a cocktail party of viruses who had been let in by the MTX virus. As a writer working from a home office, I can sincerely say that a Web site helped save my working life.

McAfee: make it your first stop when your PC finds itself under attack

WEIRD FAY WOLFTREE

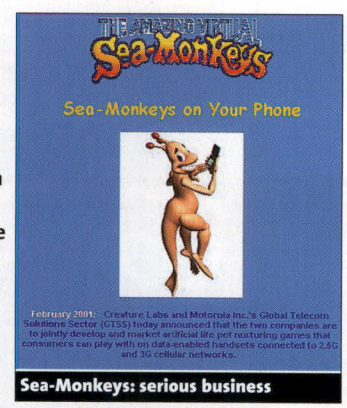
Too much monkey business

'INSTANT PETS! SEE THEM COME TO LIFE BEFORE your eyes!' Remember the 60s and 70s comic book ads for Sea-Monkeys, merry little aquatic fellows depicted cavorting about attired in top hats? They're back...and how.

Keen to replace the once-frisky Sea-Monkeys which I slowly simmered to death on the window sill last summer, I naively typed 'Sea-Monkeys' into Altavista, figuring there'd be no need to refine my search. How much can there be to say about brine shrimp which are, after all, fish food? Quite a lot, apparently. I got 4,442 results.

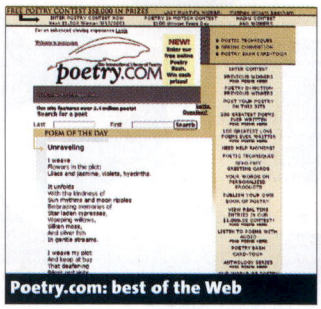
My quest for Artemia Nyos, to give them their proper name, started at the UK-based Netfysh (*www.netfysh.com*) where visitors can view original Sea-Monkey ads and sign a petition to stop cruelty to the loveable crustaceans – including racing (the mind boggles). There's good, sensible advice on keeping them alive and the hardcore enthusiast can salivate over collectibles and rarities.

From Netfysh, a sick compulsion forced me to follow the link to Mr Happy's moving tale of unintentional serial Sea-Monkey murder and thence to The Sea-Monkey Worship page (*www.seamonkey-worship.com*). No, wait, it gets worse: I'm the 448,889th visitor. The delights of this site include a section where new arrivals are celebrated and the recently deceased mourned (people actually give the things names); a forum where Sea-Monkey welfare is discussed; and a message board for the semi-literate and deranged. A sceptical click on the Celebrity section reveals famous Sea-Monkey fans to include a bloke who once played a baddie in *Beverly Hills 90210*, and Brooke Shields. They like to forage for titbits in her eyebrows. Probably.



Sea-Monkeys: serious business

The Sea-Monkey Owners Page (*home.coqui.net/menace/seamonke.htm*) offers a screensaver, a 'Plasma Blast' game and a Tamagotchi-style desktop game. Helplessly sucked in, I went ahead with my order at Netfysh and my Sea-Monkey Magic Castle arrived a week later. I am now the proud owner of a couple of dozen darting dots which will grow to a couple of centimetres in length and spend most of their life reproducing. This time, they might even live long enough to see their children grow up.



Poetry.com: best of the Web

POETRY
SHAWNA NOBLE

Rhyme and reason in cyberspace

IT'S NOT THAT I'M NEW TO POETRY, but when you haven't had much to do with ode-penning since leaving school, trying to awaken the muse makes you feel like a baby taking its first steps. And so, with the Internet at my fingertips, I decided to look up a few sites to help me get back in the groove.

Writer's Block (***www.webdelsol.com***) seemed appropriately named for my needs and a read of the home page encouraged me to take a closer look. The site suggests that poets submit their poems online to be critiqued by other writers, as well as the staff editors. If you don't want to subject your own poetry to scrutiny right away, you can spend some time reading the efforts of (and responses to) others who have already taken that step. This is a great help; if you can see what's wrong with someone else's poem, you're more likely to see what's wrong with yours.

For professional and optimistic help, with advice on writing techniques and styles, Poetry.com (***www.poetry.com***) is a good bet. Those who are actually gutsy enough to submit their own poems could find themselves getting published in a Poetry.com anthology and winning prize money into the bargain. Your poem might even earn the coveted spot of Poem of the Day or Poem of the Week.

Poetry.com also offers to publish your collection of poems. You get to choose format, fonts, front cover design and any other little extras you may want thrown in. Prices start at $400 for 15 copies of a 60-page book. Now, all I need to do is remember how to open a Word document in the first place...

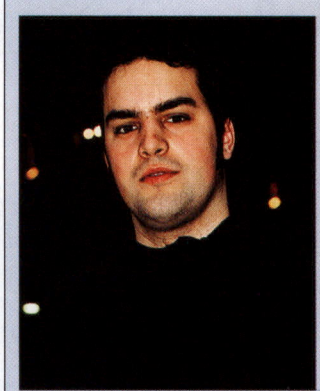
Look what we've found!

THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM What have visitors to the NHM been surfing for?

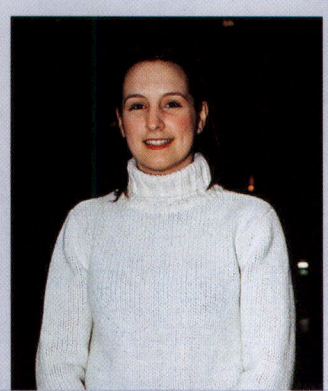
DEBBIE CHAPMAN
COMMUNICATIONS ASSISTANT
I use the Net to see how other museums' sites are set up, plus clubbing and holiday deals. My favourite sites are London Zoo's (***www.londonzoo.com***) and Radio 1 (***www.bbc.co.uk/radio1***).

DAVID RICHMOND
CUSTOMER SERVICE
I use the Net to book holidays, find hard-to-find vinyl records and read about football. Although I don't have a favourite site as such, I use Virgin (***www.virgin.com***) and Yahoo! (***uk.yahoo.com***) quite a lot.

CAROLINE ELLERTON
SOCIAL WORKER
I use the Net for everything. I looked up the Museum's site (***www.nhm.ac.uk***), I do my banking with Nationwide online (***www.nationwide.co.uk***), and my son likes to use it.

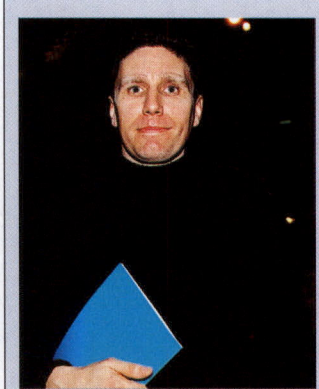


STUART SWIFT
STUDENT
I visit record labels' sites and download a lot of music from Napster (***www.napster.com***). I also like to follow Wolverhampton Wanderers (***www.wolves.co.uk***).



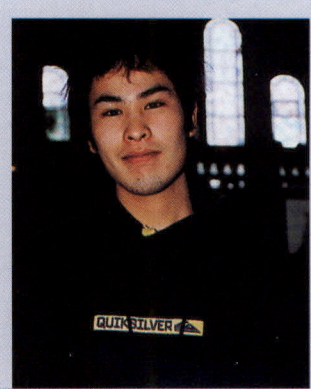
RHIANE DAVIS
STUDENT
I mainly use the Internet for research. It's also great for ordering train and concert tickets, and for downloading music from sites like Napster (***www.napster.com***).

SHERRY MANSFIELD
TEACHER
I use the Net to look up things I'm using in class. Sites like ***www.teacher.com***, ICTeachers (***www.icteachers.co.uk***) and Lessonplans (***www.leapnyc.org***) are good.



JIM BUNDY
ENGINEER
I do a lot of research for my children, and visit sports and travel sites myself. I'm a football fan and run a small team, so FootballNews (***www.footballnews.co.uk***) is probably my favourite site.

JOE DANIELS
MUSEUM TOUR GUIDE
I use the Net to send emails, visit record labels' sites and track down rare records. Warp Records (***www.warprecords.com***) is the one I visit most often. Their whole back catalogue and live stuff is online.



KOBAYASHA HASA
STUDENT IN JAPAN
I'm here sightseeing, but I use the Internet at home to send emails with Hotmail (***www.hotmail.com***) and also to find out about music. I look at Sony Music's Web site (***www.sonymusic.com***) most often.

INTERVIEWS: JENNIFER KEARNS; PICTURES: RICHARD LAWRENCE

nextmonth »

://On the shelves May 2

AWARDS 2001

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Dear Sir

LETTER OF THE MONTH I read with interest your article on ADSL (April issue), in particular your remark referring to the difficulties of people being online within 15 days.

While I do not profess to be British Telecom's greatest fan I must confess that back in January this statement was correct. I first approached BT on 15 January 2001. I was first informed by the operator that ADSL could be obtained from other suppliers, and was then asked if I wished to proceed with the order from BT.

I did proceed with BT and my ADSL modem was installed on 30 January, which was exactly 15 days. I did encounter a couple of days' problems, but with the help of very friendly staff have since had 99 percent trouble-free surfing.

I do hope all your readers are able to connect to this service asap. The difference is awesome.

Wayne Wilson, South Manchester

A point worth making. While many have reported problems getting their faster connection up and running, there are a lot of very happy surfers out there already enjoying the wonders of ADSL and broadband. And if you're wondering what all the fuss is about, see page 38 for the lowdown on super-quick access and the sites you'll be able to enjoy in full.

Dear Sir

First the compliment, then the brickbat. Congratulations on a well put-together magazine which manages to pack an enormous amount of good material between the covers and remains a point of reference after it is read. However, there must be one exception that proves the rule.

After reading Darryl delaHoyde's email on your letters page (April issue) and as a one-time user of Freeserve's first attempts at unmetered access, I was interested to read the article behind the headline on the front of your issue. Entitled 'Flat-fee access: the truth', it was billed as 'The only test of every flat-fee provider'.

Far from telling me 'the truth' about flat-fee access, I was left knowing next to nothing about the detail I required to make an informed choice. There were references to connection speeds being 'extremely consistent', but what were they? I would have liked details of some connection speeds to help me justify a whopping £39.98 a month all-in charge for 24/7 access to Demon as against £13.99 for Sniffout and other similarly priced offerings. For me, consistent connection means between 45,333 and 46,667kbps on a standard BT connection with a 56kb V.90 modem. It would have also been useful to know just what these ISPs provided by way of software on their CDs, or extra software programs, or content on their site and the competence and cost of technical support.

Like the *X-Files*, the truth is out there somewhere, but sadly not in your flat-fee offering.

David Finegan, via email

Constraints of space make it impossible to include every available detail – though we're happy to provide specific test details via email on request. And, as of this month, full details on all fixed-fee providers appear in our comprehensive monthly ISP round-up.

Dear Sir

I was extremely pleased to see Ezboard (***www.ezboard.com)*** featured in April's edition of *the net*.

I have been a member since April 2000 and have a well established main 'Interest' community and a smaller 'Disability' community. I have made online friends and the actual service is excellent.

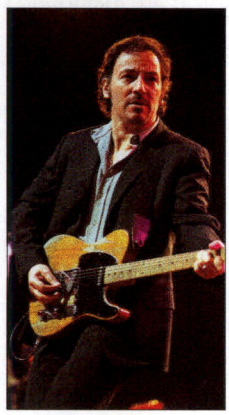
It is no longer totally free – if you don't want to see ads on any of the boards you look at there is a small twice-yearly fee, but if ads aren't a problem then it costs nothing to set-up a board and make loads of new friends all over the world.

Ruth Upton, via email

A reader rants

Hands off our fan sites

I was interested to read in your April issue about Bruce Springsteen's unsuccessful attempt to remove a 'squatter' using his domain name. While I'm not particularly in favour of people who try to use other people's names for commercial profit, I'm heartily sick of big corporations ganging up on individuals who have been innovative enough to use the Web to express their admiration of bands, film stars, authors, etc.



I run a fan site for a well-known band and have received numerous emails from their record company requesting I remove all MP3s (which I was happy to do), lyrics (which they publish in their liner notes!) and logos from my site. I wonder what purpose such heavy-handed tactics serve. Fan sites like mine encourage people to buy records and go to concerts; you'd think this would be regarded as a good thing. After all, I'm sure the actual artists involved aren't at all bothered.

Now I hear Warner Bros have come under fire for threatening Harry Potter sites, most of which are run by teenagers. It'd be interesting to see what happened if all the visitors to such sites stopped buying Harry Potter merchandise and boycotted the forthcoming film. I wonder if attitudes might change a bit?

John Ainsworth, via email

Dear Sir

While flicking through your March issue, I came across your advice centre guide to building a site using moonfruit.com. I had wanted to design my own Web page for some time, but found the idea of learning HTML or another complicated language very daunting.

However, after reading your article and following the steps while logged onto Moonfruit, I now have a fantastic site up and running and, what's more, I really enjoyed doing it.

Thank you so much for showing me how easy and fun it can be to set up and maintain a Web site. Keep up the good work.

Lisa, via email

Dear Sir

What I love most about the Internet is that it is not, repeat not, a boys' toy. Just as many of my female friends have their own Web sites as my male friends, and us girls are now just as obsessed with size and speed (when it comes to memory and connection) as are the blokes (when it comes to just about anything). But there still seems to be a boy snobbery about the purely technical side of things. What other explanation is there for my husband being decidedly huffy when I threw my own Web site together in the space of an hour (using templates, admittedly) and insisting on continuing to slowly and painstakingly write his own site using HTML and Java? Is using templates as unmanly as, say, driving an automatic car or eating quiche? We should be told.

Jane Fellows, Dagenham

WINE FOR WORDS!

The writer of Letter of the Month wins a case of fine wine from Rouge-Blanc.com, the award-winning Web site bringing 'Calais prices' to your door.

Rouge & Blanc®
http://www.rouge-blanc.com

PICTURES: PA, ANGELA LUBRANO/LIVE

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Highbrow heaven for the thinking surfer

SALON.COM ***www.salon.com*** The site that found proof of intelligent lifeforms in cyberspace

WEB SITE CREATION MAY BE IN ITS relative infancy, but already there are 'rules'. Don't overuse Flash – it just irritates your user. Don't create new boxes every time a page is opened – nobody will thank you. And, most crucially of all, don't ever write more than a few paragraphs at a time – surfers' attention span is no more than a couple of minutes.

While salon.com has been quite steadfast in adhering to the former rules, it breaks the latter on a daily basis – to such an extent that, by rights, it should be out of business by now. But then Salon has made its name by bending the conventional rules of the Web.

On its launch late in 1995, most observers gave the 'highbrow' portal little chance of holding its own in the fast-moving new economy. That Salon is still going strong more than five years later testifies that strong ideas will always rise to the top.

Indeed, despite fluctuating share prices and doom-mongering Web analysts, the traffic figures suggest Salon is thriving. During the peak of last year's US presidential election, it recorded 50 million page views from 2.9 million unique visitors; an all-time high for the site.

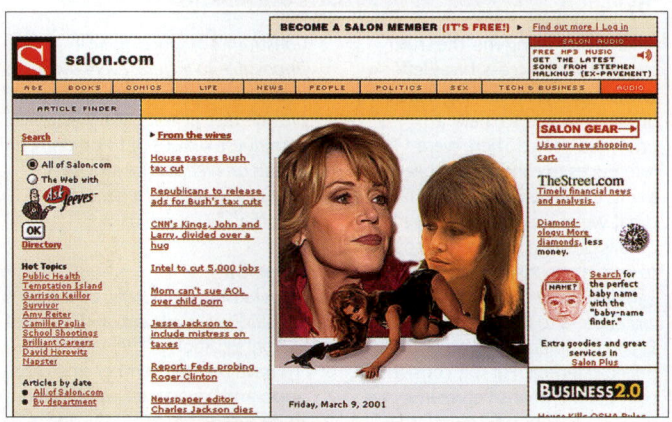
The man behind the phenomenon is chairman David Talbot. A former *San Francisco Examiner* journalist who has also written for *Playboy* and *Rolling Stone*, Talbot saw a niche in the market for an informative, well-written, global online magazine at a time when most Web media services were focused on quick news and bite-size chunks. He started Salon as an arts-based publication with a small editorial staff, before rapidly securing funding to expand it into its present incarnation.

Talbot describes it as a 'smart tabloid'. On an average day, political analysis rubs shoulders with news headlines, financial advice, in-depth film reviews, celebrity interviews, arts and high-profile columnists who have included Camille Paglia and Radiohead's Thom Yorke. The bulletin boards buzz with highbrow discussion. One thing is clear: Salon refuses to compromise. If an article demands 4,000 words, it gets it.

'When we have long features, people plow through them,' says Salon's vice-president Joan Walsh. 'You can watch traffic and know if you lose readers from page to page, and we saw people would hang in for a good four-or-five page story if it's well-written and engaging.'

The mainstream media, which scoffed at the very idea of an online magazine providing a threat, has been forced to take Salon seriously, showering it with awards and breathless eulogies. Rumour has it that CNN refused to carry a TV ad for the site, seeing it as a rival. When Salon revealed that the White House had pressured TV networks into placing anti-drug messages in popular shows, it was an exclusive that scooped every offline source.

Financially, however, Salon is a victim of its own success. Advertisers are put off by its refusal to drop the highbrow stories that draw so much traffic in the first place, presenting Salon with the classic content provider's quandary: how to make money when you aren't selling anything. Trumpeted as one of the hottest technology stocks when it floated in 1999, Salon's price plummeted in the dot com depression.



:SALON.COM

WHAT IS IT?
The Web's weightiest read, mixing cultural criticism with political insight, news and well-known columnists

LAUNCHED
1995

TRAFFIC
2.9 million unique visitors in December 2000, spending an average of 26 minutes on site

BASE
San Francisco

KEY FEATURES
Sections for a broad range of cultural topics, from movies and art to celebrities and sex. Includes news, financial info and bulletin boards

Last summer it shed around a tenth of its workforce in a bid for profitability.

The only viable long-term solution may be to charge, an approach which few sites have found successful. 'We are investigating ways to charge for access,' says Walsh. 'I don't see us ever making the entire site off limits, but there are other options under consideration. We love the ethic of free information on the Web, but what we produce isn't free.' She says the scare stories over the site's future have prompted a deluge of emails offering to pay.

The future is by no means guaranteed. But Salon has bucked the trend once, by being thought-provoking and ground-breaking in a medium known for short-termism. It could well do it again.

Salon's Walsh: discovering there's profit in words

WORDS: ROBERT JEFFERY. PICTURE: BOB HAUSER

brightsparks»

:// People doing great things online

Sorting the cowboys from the cavalry

www.skills-register.com

If you're a homeowner or have your own business you'll probably be familiar with the trepidation that comes when you have to get a 'little man' in to do repairs. Unless you've been recommended someone, there's no way to know whether you're getting in a tradesperson you can trust or a cowboy. When Will Stevens started his Web design company a few years ago, he was thinking of his own experiences of second-rate merchants. 'I'd accessed people through a phone directory or paper, and thought some sort of qualified register would be useful – both to service providers and service users.'

Stevens launched his own online directory of approved tradespeople in January. The Skills Register (***www.skills-register.com***) provides homes and businesses with the details of reliable services, from architects to accountants. Stevens explains: 'By putting all the relevant information on the site, the consumer can look at the company's CV and make their own decision about whether or not they want to contact them.'

Each service provider that applies to become a site member is subject to a stringent vetting procedure that has been developed with advice from Stevens' local Trading Standards office. And to make sure only the cream of companies makes it onto the register, the number of entries is limited. 'What we want to do is go for quality companies in every trade category, so we've put on a cap of 10 per category, per postcode area,' says Stevens.

'We go for quality companies in every trade category'

A register of approved and vetted tradespeople is just what anyone who's ever risked engaging a total stranger has been crying out for, as the figures show; at the end of the first month the site had already had 30,000 visitors.

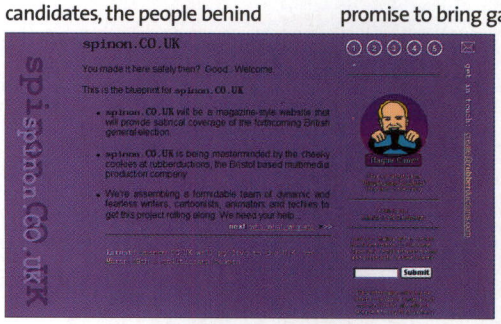
As well as helping consumers, the Skills Register is doing its bit for the rest of the community, too. This year 10 percent of the revenue from the members' subscription fees will go to The Prince's Trust Volunteers programme, which helps young people improve their skills through team work in the community. Says Stevens: 'Our contribution will go towards funding those projects, whether it's restoration, renovation or old people's homes.'

Skills Register will be monitored by an annual review committee made up of representatives from people who use the site. Their input will go beyond consumer feedback. Stevens explains: 'One of the aspects of the committee will be to decide whether the contribution to the Prince's Trust continues, or whether we look to assist and fund more local projects directly.'

:SPINON.CO.UK

www.spinon.co.uk

Freedom of speech and the Internet go together like rhubarb and custard, and at no time is this affiliation so blatant as when a political election is on the horizon. Inspired by the type of satirical tomfoolery that's directed at US candidates, the people behind Rubberductions (***www.rubberductions.com***) are preparing to aim their mocking sticks at British politicians ahead of the upcoming vote.



Dubbing itself 'the alternative election Web site', Spinon.co.uk went live on 19 March, with the promise to bring games, animation, videos and quality text content to an election which is shaping up to be 'the dullest thing since the Dome's closing party'. Spinon's creators namecheck Bonrop (***www.bonrop.net***) and Indecision2000 (***www.comedycentral.com/indecision2000***) as prime inspirations, the former site being behind perhaps some of the most sardonic political commentary on the Bush vs Gore battle. Check out the 'Gorebo: Last Blood' mock video if you don't believe us.

At the time of writing, only a nifty Shockwave piece called 'Hague Goes Trucking' and a new spin on Labour's advertising campaign were available to view on Spinon. Both of which undoubtedly had their thorns in the right place. At *the net* we're expecting great things from this site – and so should you.

You never knew you needed it...

www.gizmoandwidget.com

If necessity is the mother of invention, then gadgets are its likeably eccentric uncle, put here to boost life's humour factor and make the incidentals of our existence all the more manageable.

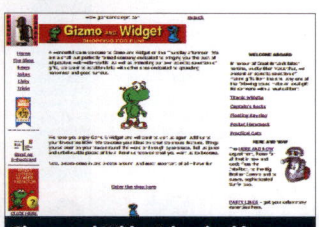
To that end, Gizmo and Widget is in the business of fostering pleasure and convenience for anyone with

Skills Register's Will Stevens: wants everyone to get a good service

WORDS: JENNIFER KEARNS, ALEX NEWBY; PICTURES: STEVE ORINO

access to the World Wide Web with its cheerful collection of weird and wonderful knick-knacks.

Actor-turned-Net entrepreneur, Adam Norton, and his partner, Web master Julian Stokes, certainly seem to know what people want. 'Gizmo and Widget started off as a shop on the move, selling gifts and novelties at various events,' explains Norton. 'People would come up to us and say, "you must start a mail-order catalogue", but we resisted.' So what was it about the Net, then, that



Gizmo and Widget: inspired lunacy

lured Norton away from life on the road? 'It's absolutely ideal because it allows us to constantly add new things, whereas mail order would have meant selling the same stuff.'

And if there's one thing Gizmo and Widget doesn't sell, it's the same old stuff. Whether you're in need of a pet tornado to please your favourite scientist, a 'fire-breathing' Nunzilla to ruffle the gowns of the nearest clergy, an Instant Aquarium video to up the marine factor of your TV, or Sea Monkeys to prompt a trip down memory lane, you're sure to find it here.

'The other great thing,' Norton enthuses, 'is that the site has an ethos, in the sense that we call it "shopping for fun". It's got a lot of editorial content – jokes, news and online demos – so people stay on the site even if they don't buy on their first visit.'

Gizmo and Widget has recently signed up with Rools.com, a pre-payment scheme that allows teenagers to shop online without the need for credit cards. 'We'd like kids of all ages, from eight to 80, to enjoy our site,' explains Norton. And enjoyment, as anyone will tell you, is one of life's little necessities.

GOLF SHOPPING ONLINE

Take a golf course in bargain hunting

Quality and value are par for the course when you shop for golf kit online

THE NEW GOLF SEASON IS UPON us. The green's been hollow-tined, top-dressed and rolled to perfection. As the days grow longer, so grows the call of the fairway louder.

And what better way to tee off into spring than with a set of the new high-performance Titleist DCI 990 irons, as favoured by Sergio Garcia and retailing for £599? We used the 990s for price-comparison purposes as we searched the Web for the best of the golf gear sites.

The thinking behind Golfstore (***www.golfstore.co.uk***) is sound, but the design is distinctly off-par. The 'Super fast menu' is infuriatingly slow and fiddly, and it took ages to locate the Holidays section flagged by the top banner. A pity, because there's a decent product range here, with sections for women, lefties and children, used kit auctions and accessories ranging from DVDs and practice equipment, to sunglasses and an 'apothecary'. Regulars can set up a personal account to get five percent off all purchases. The Titleists cost £549 and delivery's free over £50.

Direct Golf (***www.direct-golf.co.uk***) is a PGA-approved site which takes a distinctly businesslike approach. Products are viewed by brand name, but you have to click on each item to investigate dexterity and ladies options. The Titleist DCI 990s cost £499 and delivery is free over £100.

Hipaction.com (***www.hipaction.com***) opens with an alluring glimpse of a sun-dappled fairway and a panel of links to golfing news. As well as reasonably priced kit, there's a free classifieds section and an advice service. Titleists aren't stocked, but prices seem average. Free delivery over £25.

County Golf (***www.county-golf.co.uk***) looks and behaves like a warehouse; a big, badly-signposted warehouse where visitors get hopelessly lost. Site navigation is not easy, but there are bargains to be had, plus useful things like training aids and problem-solving clubs. You view all items in one category at a time, but annoyingly you have to click on each to find its price. Delivery free over £150.

ETONIC COMFORT GOLF SHOES
£54.95
Stride up and down the fairway in (waterproof) style and ease courtesy of these rather nifty classic shoes.

The cheapest DCI 990s were at Golfmegadeals' (***www.golfmegadeals.com***) straightforward, no-frills site; £480 plus £5.50 delivery. The design is simple, with just four headings: irons, putters, woods and balls. One click takes you to a chart of all products in that category, including RRPs versus Golfmegadeals' prices. Just don't expect kit for children or beginners, or nifty accessories.

By far the most clear, friendly and professional site we visited was Onlinegolf (***www.onlinegolf.co.uk***). The home page lures you in with special offers and a free 30-day trial on irons and woods. Navigation is a cinch: the main menu stays at the top of the screen, while sub-menus pop up to the left. All the top names are here and there are separate shops for women, southpaws and juniors. Accessories include books, videos, golfing hero head covers, practice nets and personalised balls. This is the only site we visited to spare a thought for beginners, with a section about golf rules, practising your swing, etc. The Titleist irons cost £515.95, with free delivery.

Golf4less (***www.golf4less.co.uk***) is fine if you know what you're looking for by brand name; otherwise, you're lost. The design is bitty and the content poorly integrated, but the range and prices aren't bad at all. The DCI 990s cost just under £500 and delivery over £50 is free.

Another victim of poor design is Easy Golf (***www.easygolf.co.uk***), although the content is decent, including auctions and special offers. Gear for left-handers, juniors and starters could only be found with the search facility. The Titleist irons weren't available and we couldn't find delivery prices, either.

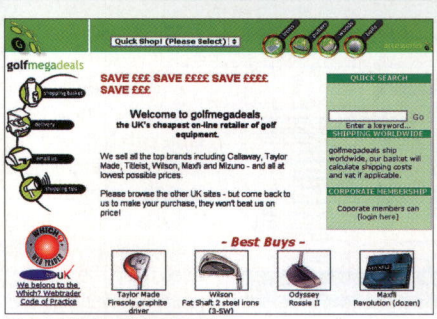
Clear design makes a welcome reappearance with Golfshopper (***www.golfshopper.co.uk***). There are five distinct shops – men, ladies, junior, accessories and view by maker – plus an information section with golf news and a handy buyer's guide. No Titleist clubs, but delivery is free in the UK.

The logic behind the Medwaygolf (***www.medwaygolf.co.uk***) site defies comprehension. Prices are good – the Titleists cost £499 – but product information is scant, to say the least. To find out more, you have to submit an enquiry form – even to find out if men's right-handed is the only option and how much delivery costs. No kids or beginners here, and one suspects that ladies would be discouraged, too.

Despite a propensity for dodgy design and site navigation, there are many bargains to be had out there, so go on, treat yourself. You know it will help you improve your handicap.

;-) Our golf sites

ONLINE GOLF
www.onlinegolf.co.uk ★★★★★
Fast, friendly, professional and well-thought-out, an excellent site for pro and novice alike.



GOLFMEGADEALS
www.golfmegadeals.com ★★★
Low prices, simple design and product charts make it easy to compare prices and features.

GOLFSHOPPER
www.golfshopper.co.uk ★★★★
Clear design welcomes golfers of all ages and abilities; extremely useful buyer's product guide.

WORDS: FAY WOLFTREE. ADDITIONAL RESEARCH: SHAWNA NOBLE; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT

TOP FLITE XL2000 TITANIUM GOLF BALLS £15.95/dozen
Titanium is golf's current buzzword, and these balls indicate why: they last longer, cover longer distances – and fly through the air in a stylish way...

HIPPO GIANT DRIVER £249.95
These have a larger 'sweet spot', increasing your odds of putting an extra 20 yards on your drive.

TOP-FLITE XL 2000 IRONS £249.95 PER SET
These are cavity backed so, again, the odds of you connecting with balls go way up.

WILSON CONFORM GLOVES £9.95
For a tighter grip and hard-wearing performance check out this pair of golf essentials.

WILSON KA1 GOLF BAG £89.95
This is a good, lightweight bag – perfect for those unused to carrying anything heavier than the *FT*.

WILSON WINDBREAKER UMBRELLA £24.95
The rather clever design on this ensures that, however windy, it won't turn inside out.

GOLFSTORE
www.golfstore.co.uk ★★★
Fine range of products and services, including holidays and auctions, but let down by design.

HIPACTION
www.hipaction.com ★★★
Attractive site which includes free classifieds and an advice service. Nothing for the ladies, though.

DIRECT GOLF
www.direct-golf.co.uk ★★★
Comprehensive PGA-approved site for serious golfers who know what they want.

THANKS TO ONLINE GOLF FOR THE ITEMS SEEN ON THIS PAGE. ONLINE GOLF IS AT ***www.onlinegolf.co.uk***

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1 ANGELICSLAYER.COM

www.angelicslayer.com

If you can't find what you want on the Web, go and put it there yourself. Fifteen-year-old *Buffy The Vampire Slayer* fan Michelle from Arizona did just that when she couldn't find adequate info on her favourite show and, two years later, the resultant site has become the number one Buffy resource online and a glowing testament to what the average fan can achieve on their own.

Angelic Slayer is devoted in equal part to Buffy and its spin-off show, Angel, offering plot summary, cast and key quotes from each show, along with actors biographies, character analyses and, of course, hundreds of Sarah Michelle Gellar photos.

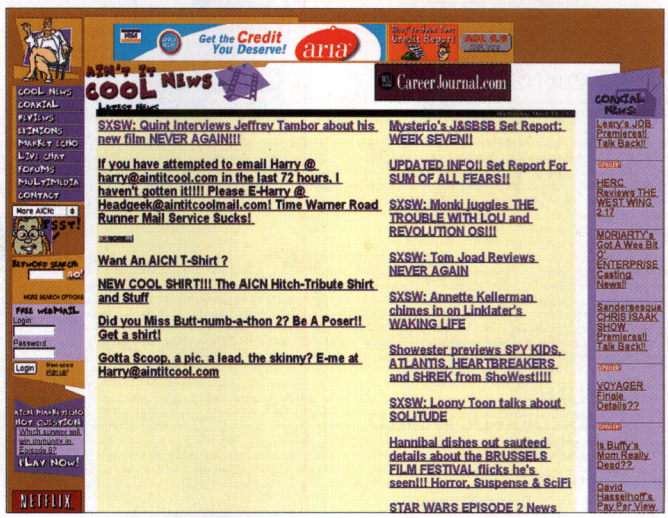
Once an amateur site gets big, though, not all of the attention is welcome. The immense popularity of this Buffy site (two million hits to date) brought it into conflict with 20th Century Fox, angry at its transcription of Buffy scripts. 'Cease and Desist orders from Fox's lawyers was not something I ever expected,' says Michelle, 'but through the year long process of altering my site to meet their rules, I learned a lot about law and just how ungrateful companies can be to the people that work for nothing.

'When I blacked out my site for a week to protest at Fox shutting Buffy sites down, the support I got from the fans was really unbelievable. I received over a thousand emails from people expressing thanks. The fact I had that support, even when not a section of my sites could be accessed, I knew I was doing something right.'

25 greatest sites you've built

Not every great site has to cost the earth. Presenting 25 individuals who've built something brilliant from their bedroom

In these days of multi-million dot com mania, it's easy to assume the little guy has been completely forgotten in the stampede. Not so. As every seasoned surfer knows, it's often the sites built from the most meagre of resources which turn out to be the most enjoyable. With this in mind, we've trawled the Web for the best examples of home-made online excellence. From lavish fan shrines to brilliant niche ideas, our top 25 is a tribute to what can be done with a bit of time, a little imagination and a modem. All our sites are run on a not-for-profit basis by ordinary surfers who've simply stumbled on a promising idea or decided to share a hobby with the world through a personal site. All it takes is word of mouth, a few recommendations from the right people and a bit of luck to attract as many as 2 million visitors, like our number one site (see left). And if that makes you wonder just what you could achieve if you put your mind to it, turn to page108 and find out how to get started...



2 TV CREAM

tv.cream.org

Cult television programmes are one of the bedrocks of pub conversation: thanks to TV Cream, they're also one of the home-made Web success stories of recent years. This amazing resource started life in 1997 as a repository of information and reminiscences of popular shows from the 60s, 70s and 80s. It captured the public imagination immediately by creating an A-Z list of shows to answer those most frequently argued-over enquiries (were the *Captain Pugwash* characters obscene? What was the *Bagpuss* theme tune?). The 'five-or-so' creators of the site are all themselves 20-somethings employed within the industry. While incredibly secretive about their identities, spokesman Steve does reveal: 'It's something we all work on when we come home from work at night...I got about 2,000 emails last year with enquiries.' Many of those came from dot coms looking to buy the site out, but Steve and Co are refusing to give up their non-profit stance: 'We all believe information should be shared.' That said, look out for a possible TV Cream TV spin-off being proposed. A home-grown diamond.

3 AIN'T IT COOL NEWS

www.aintitcool.com

They all may only be in their late 20s, but the team behind Ain't It Cool News (AICN) have established themselves as a force to be reckoned with. *Premiere* has called AICN's founder, Harry Knowles, one of Hollywood's most powerful people, while *Yahoo! Internet Life* magazine named the site one of the best in the industry. Featuring movie articles, late-breaking titbits, interviews, reviews, chat and trailers, this amateur site can hold its own against the big boys and is required reading for Hollywood execs, several of who are known to have actually blamed Knowles personally for the failure of their flicks. And with a weekly TV series and radio show in the pipeline, AICN look set to take over all media outlets while remaining fiercely independent. 'We turned down offers of $25 million from venture capitalists and have stuck to our philosophy of taking things one step at a time,' trumpeted AICN's Paul Alvarado-Dykstra. Judging from the traffic they receive (over two million unique users), AICN have obviously made the right choice. »

4 ONLINE GUITAR ARCHIVE

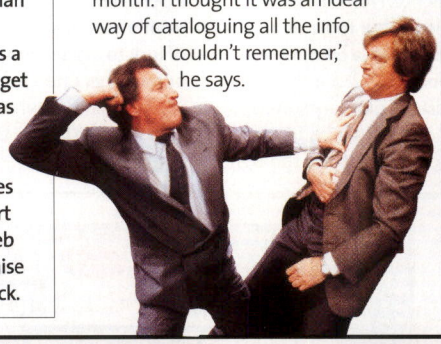
www.olga.net

Forget Napster – this is the original online music exchange. This archive of 37,000 guitar chord patterns, riffs and arpeggios started out as a newsgroup that swapped knowledge on popular chords by the likes of Nirvana back in the early 90s. It soon branched out, as amateur axe-wielders saw the value in sharing chords directly with others rather than shelling out for expensive official books, and now offers a chord generator to help you get your fingering right, as well as a huge search engine. The files are all stored off-site, however, as record companies threatened Napster-like court actions against Olga: the Web masters are now trying to raise funds from users to fight back.

5 CORRIE NET

www.corrie.net

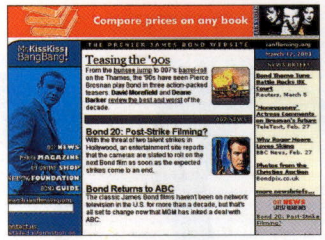
It's no surprise to see *Coronation Street*'s offline success transfer itself to the Web; for Graham Allsopp, being Web master and founder of the best unofficial Corrie site around, has proved a time-consuming sideline. The 40-year-old cartographer first started Corrie Net as an informal newsgroup in 1994, but has since seen his archive of character and plot information and news attract 200,000 visitors a month. 'I thought it was an ideal way of cataloguing all the info I couldn't remember,' he says.



6 TOM'S HARDWARE GUIDE

www.tomshardware.com

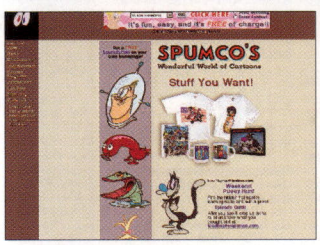
While the movie moguls run scared of Harry Knowles, 35-year-old London-based trainee doctor Tom Pabst has a similar effect on the hardware industry. A thumbs up from Tom or one of his globally placed reviewers for the latest notebook, MP3 player, monitor and all manner of other complex technical add-ons, will boost sales, enhance reputations and in some instances send shares rising. Tom, an over achieving computer buff since his teens back in Germany, is making money from banner ads but runs the site purely for his love of gadgetry – and given his background, it's no surprise to find design standards which put many so-called professional efforts to shame.



7 MR KISS KISS BANG BANG

www.ianfleming.org

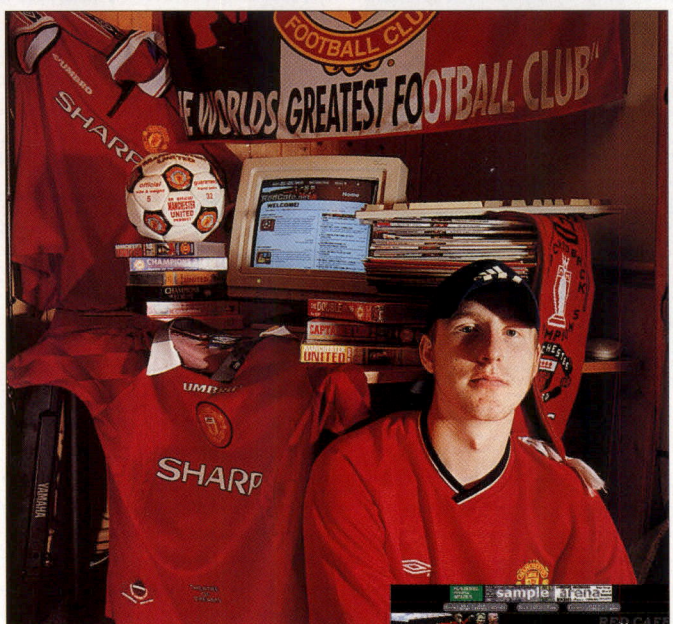
Fandom inspires many great works – in the case of the loose collective of James Bond obsessives behind this extensive site, it borders on brilliance. MKKBB is run by four devotees from the US and Greece and updates daily with 007 headlines and rumours, alongside a huge guide to all things Bond-related that's helped pull in 5,000 visitors a day. So comprehensive is this guide that it's even received the endorsement of the Ian Fleming Foundation: 'We like to think we can please the purists,' says editor David Morefield. 'We're the site that gets it right... we understand and share their obsession and discuss Bond intelligently, in depth and with an attention to facts.' MKKBB... we've been expecting you.



8 SPUMCO WONDERFUL WORLD OF CARTOONS

www.spumco.com

Fans of the early *Ren & Stimpy* cartoons (before humourless Nickelodeon's bigwigs sacked creator John K) will immediately recognise the bold, bad, frighteningly manic characters on this site. Thanks to the combined efforts of K, artist Jim Smith, Web master Steve Worth and the dubiously-named chihuahua, Lil' Pal, visitors can expect a bombardment of sometimes tasteless, often shocking and always enlightening animated fun. Even more impressive is K's series of articles, which cover everything from a Warner Brothers Cartoon Companion to cartoons' roots. And if online games are more your bag, check out Lil' Pal's Center for Chihuahua Exploitation, where you can play Wak-a-Chihuahua.



9 REDCAFE.NET

www.redcafe.net

It might be a cliche to suggest most Manchester United supporters come from Hampshire, but it's not a claim Red Cafe supremo Stuart Taylor is about to argue against, hailing as he does from Fleet. 'They play brilliant football and that's what counts,' shrugs the A-level student. It's a love of being among the best that's made Red Cafe the number one United fan site with one million hits and has the official site running scared. Essential viewing for Red Devils.

10 TEENAGE WILDLIFE

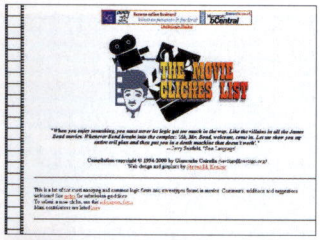
www.teenagewildlife.com

As wonderful as it is to be able to chat live to David Bowie at his very own ***www.bowienet.com***, Teenage Wildlife is probably the site that most of his fans really wanted. Taking inspiration from the way the IMDb is run, the lyrics to each Bowie song ever recorded are listed along with marks out of five awarded by site users. Started by American Evan Torrie back in 1995, six years later it has had three million hits and a recommendation from the Thin White Duke himself.

11 TV GO HOME

www.tvgohome.com

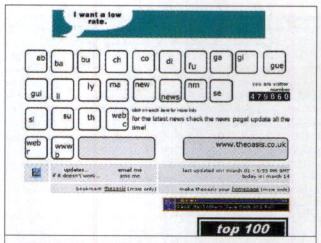
Now in its second year, TV Go Home is British satire at its best, producing fortnightly pseudo television listings that range from mildly mocking to downright rude. It's gained enough of a cult following to be picked up on by plenty of mainstream media, including a serialisation in a leading men's magazine, yet its roots remain firmly online, and its mysterious creators remain fiercely reticent about their own backgrounds. Much of the site's initial publicity was generated simply through word-of-mouth: now there are plans for a book spin-off. Given the near-the-knuckle humour on show, the Net is probably the only medium where TVGH could have possibly taken off.



12 THE MOVIE CLICHES LIST

www.moviecliches.com

They say there are no original ideas left in the movie business. And, judging from the vast amount of cliches, Italian film buff Giancarlo Cairella has compiled over the years, they could be right. Once you start to peruse the cliche topics, which range from injuries to women to skydiving, you'll realise just how banal movie plots can be. With 750,000 hits to date, this is a simple site that does exactly what it sets out to do – and has enough content to keep visitors coming back for more.



13 THEOASIS.CO.UK

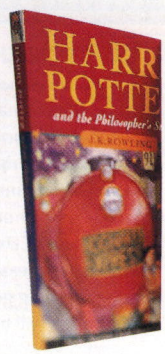
www.theoasis.co.uk

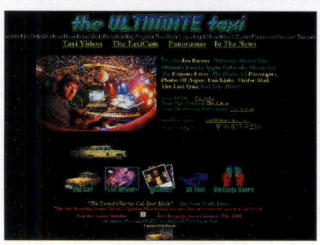
In 1998, fed up with the official Oasis site, which Richard Glover says was 'badly designed and rarely updated', he decided to create his own. Like the very best fan sites, theoasis.co.uk works because as a fan the Middlesbrough-based student has a fairly good guess at what other fans want to see. His fine work involves keeping the site regularly updated with news and going to the lengths only a true fan would, like transcribing song lyrics and working out guitar chords, too.

14 DAILY PROPHET

www.dprophet.com

For some Harry Potter fans the books are not enough. Megora McGonagall's site, written with a team of fellow Potter enthusiasts worldwide, is not so much a fan site as a kind of alternate universe, where people write and talk in the same language of 'muggles' and 'quidditchs' featured in JK Rowling's books, eg 'My wife has magic in her, and maybe more powerful than most, because she doesn't know she is doing magic at all, like Harry in book one talking to the snake'. Worrying, but very, very clever.

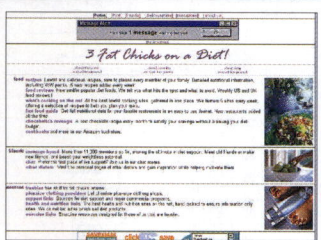




15 ULTIMATE TAXI

www.ultimatetaxi.com

When he's not selling property in Colorado, Jon Barnes operates the Ultimate Taxi, 'the only recording studio, theatre, nightclub, planetarium, toy store, Internet-connected taxicab in the world'. The site, meanwhile, is the ultimate in cheesily cheerful – all bright lights and famous faces. Yes, it seems that when celebs such as Clint Eastwood and Michael Douglas holiday in Aspen, they like nothing better than to go for a spin in Jon's cab. And he, in turn, likes nothing better than to post their photo online. Other perks include the taxicam, panoramic views of the car interior and 3D highlights (specs required).



16 3 FAT CHICKS ON A DIET

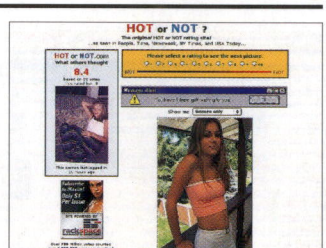
www.3fatchicks.com

3Fat Chicks profiles three Stateside siblings (Suzanne, Jennifer and Amy) who hope to inspire others to lose weight by posting their own battles online. At the time of writing the sisters had already lost a combined seven stone, 11 lbs; although Amy has put her diet on hold. Proof that not only techies can score an online hit.

17 KISS THIS GUY

www.kissthisguy.com

So, you're walking down the street, humming The Eagles' *Take It Easy*: 'lookin' for a rubber that won't blow my blubber, da, da da, da duh, duh, dum'. For all of us who've suffered the indignity of mumbling a wrong song lyric a little too loudly, there's Boston writer Scot Hacker's kissthisguy.com. With over 1,700 bungled lyrics now posted, well-intentioned music fans (not to mention the hard-of-hearing) are bound to find something they can relate to here.



18 AM I HOT OR NOT?

www.amihotornot.com

Sometimes it's the simplest ideas that are the hardest to come up with. Why no-one had thought of AIHON.com before its launch last year is a mystery – but it's making up for lost time. The concept is stunningly simple: post a picture of yourself, then let others rate you 1-10 for attractiveness. If it sounds dull, sample its addictive qualities before you criticise: part-time founders James Hong and Jim Young, Web developers who started the site as an amusing sideline, are sitting on a fortune here, with over 20,000 pics to date.

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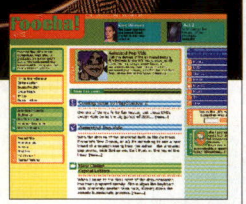
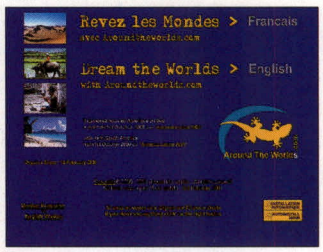


19 FOOCHA

www.foocha.co.uk

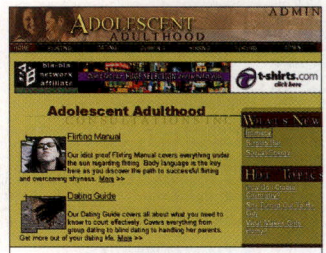
A good ezine is hard to find, but Surrey-based journalist Graham Bower though seems to have hit on the right formula with his brightly-presented mix of 12 regular columns from untrained writers the world over – including the progress of a backpacker on his 'big trip'. Elsewhere he allows public contributions for reviews of CDs, DVD, games, films, TV. There is little unifying logic to the views expressed on the site, but reading it you cannot help feeling that something good can come of this experiment; Bower, who funds the site himself, will be hoping Salon's success transfers itself to the UK.



20 AROUND THE WORLDS

www.aroundtheworlds.com

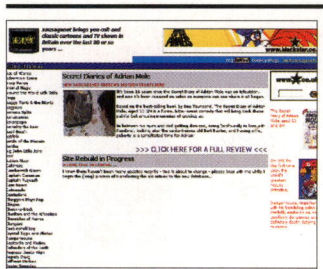
'Wherever I lay my hat is my home' types will find inspiration and a great deal of useful information from Olivier Mouroux and Philippe Aime's online travel guide. Currently trekking across South America, the pair have posted their previous expeditions (with help from Web master Ludo and several correspondents) to such far-flung destinations as Cambodia, the Sahara and India in such as way as to get even the laziest couch potato eager to roam. The photo albums capture the spirit of the regions, while the Practical Files provide information on vaccines, what you should pack and links to other travel-related sites.



21 ADOLESCENT ADULTHOOD

www.adolescentadulthood.com

Eighteen-year old boys with a mastery of Java script don't tend to have a great deal of knowledge on flirting, kissing and dumping. Advice on these, however, is what Jack Mou's site gives out to 600,000 people a month. Jack, an A-level student from Singapore, set up Adolescent Adulthood three years ago by scouring the Web for sour, witty and very hip articles on dating. He remains bemused by its success: 'I'm more of a tech guy', he admits.



22 SAUSAGENET

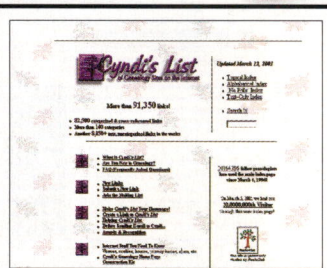
www.sausagenet.com

While TV Cream aims its sights on nostalgic telly of all descriptions, the equally well-regarded Sausagenet, run by part-time Web master Ian Brown, is devoted solely to kids' classics, from *Wacky Races* to *Willo The Wisp*, with descriptions of programmes and downloadable theme tunes. A veritable treasure trove for kids of all ages, which has grown for a rather amateurish home page into a fascinating portal.

23 FOOTBALL GROUND GUIDE

www.footballgroundguide.co.uk

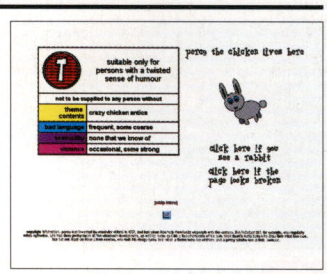
Any travelling football fan will know the frustration involved in finding an away ground: with Duncan Adams' comprehensive guide to all 92 English professional clubs, such troubles are a thing of the past. The 37-year-old Abbey National manager from Birmingham started his site as a companion to his ground-hopping hobby, which has seen him visit every ground personally – it's now one of the premier resources for supporters looking for directions, ground info or local landmarks.



24 CYNDI'S LIST

www.cyndislist.com

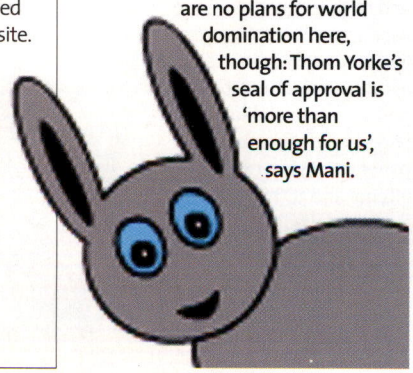
Five years ago, amateur geneaologist Cyndi Howells decided to share her knowledge of 1,000 links to registrar lists of births, death, marriages, census details on her own Web site. The feedback since then has been so incredible that at the time of writing she is now approaching 100,000 links and has notched up 20 million visitors to her site. Proof that you don't even have to produce your own content if your initial idea is strong enough to succeed.



25 PERCY THE CHICKEN

www.percythechicken.com

What started as a time-filler for two bored students has brought Mani Obhrani and Indy Lalli unexpected plaudits. Percy The Chicken, a Flash-based cartoon animation, began life as a doodle during a lecture: a few months later it was online and angst rockers Radiohead named it as one of their favourite sites. There are no plans for world domination here, though: Thom Yorke's seal of approval is 'more than enough for us', says Mani.



WORDS: ROBERT JEFFERY, JENNIFER KEARNS, DAVID ROWLEY; PICTURES: RETINA, LIVE, EMPICS

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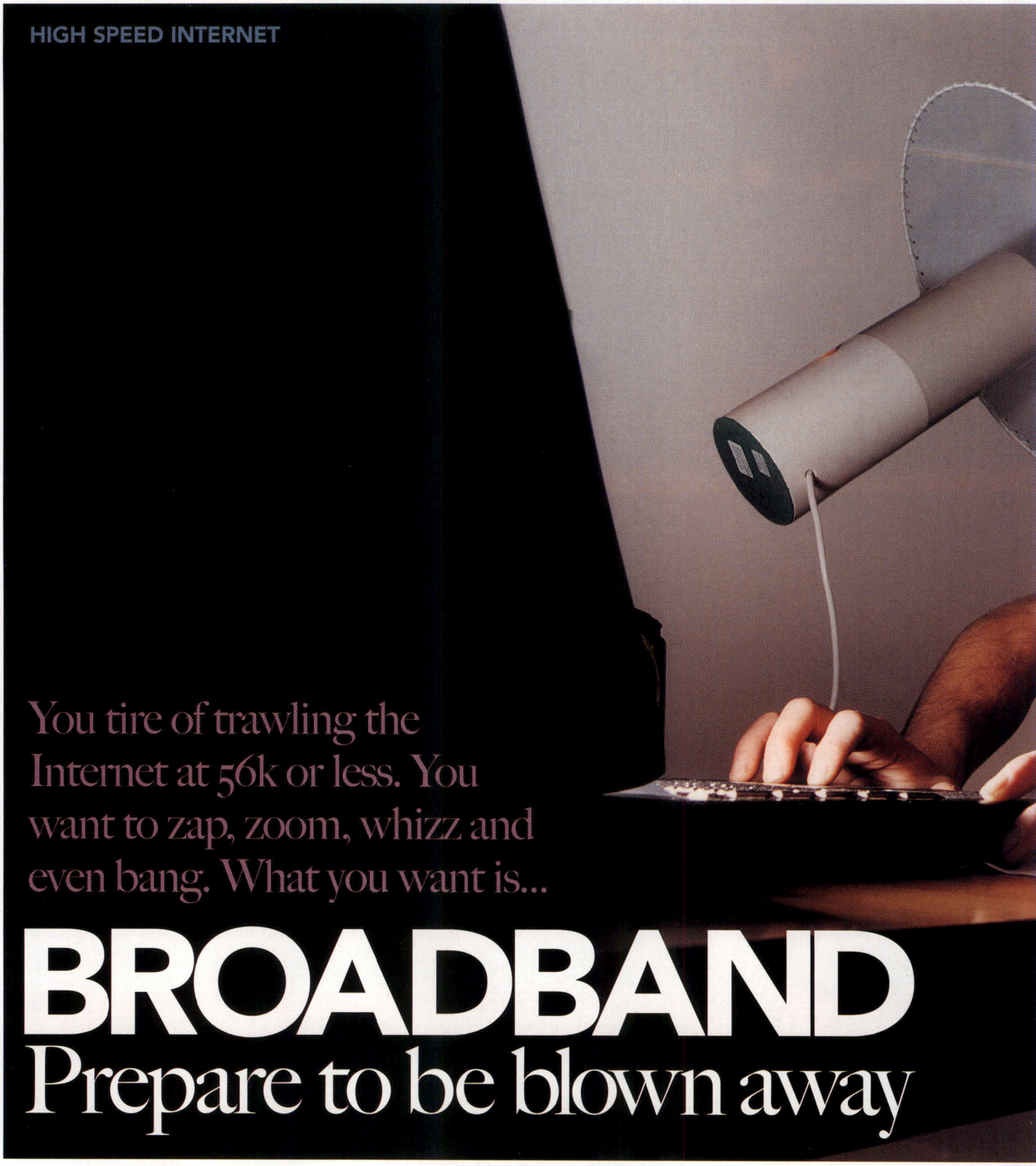


You tire of trawling the Internet at 56k or less. You want to zap, zoom, whizz and even bang. What you want is...

BROADBAND

Prepare to be blown away

WORDS: ANDY HUTCHINSON; PICTURES: STEVE ORINO

YOU HEAR ABOUT A GREAT NEW program that's just been released. You fire up your browser, head over to the download site and click on the link. The file transfer window pops up and a grimace replaces your grin as you see you've got several hours of download time ahead of you. What a world it would be, you think to yourself, if that file could arrive in minutes instead of hours. That, in a nutshell, is the promise of broadband Internet access.

Broadband is actually a cover-all term describing a variety of Internet connection types, all of which promise speeds undreamed of until now. Cable modems, ADSL, leased lines, satellite – all are broadband connections that offer welcome replacement for modem-based Internet connections. Modems are now, and always will be, a botch; crackling phone lines were never designed to carry data, and 56.6k PC modems aren't particularly brilliant at making them. Put the two together and you have a recipe for cyber porridge.

Despite the obvious difference between the varieties of broadband connection, they share a number of characteristics. Broadband connections are extremely fast, they're always on (meaning you never have to dial up) and they tend to be a lot cheaper than standard dial-up Internet connections.

The first broadband Internet connection to make any impact in this country was the cable modem. The cable companies have been spending a lot of money installing their own fibre optic network up and down the country and if you live in a large town or city, the odds are that there's a section of it running right past your front door.

Cable modems use the same fibre optic cables that are used to transmit cable TV, so if you've got that you can definitely get a cable Internet connection installed. The kinds of speeds that are possible with a cable modem are extremely impressive – typically about 512kbps, or a whole *nine times faster* than a 56k modem. A thrilling prospect.

If you live in an area serviced by ntl (***www.ntlworld.com***) or Telewest (***www.telewest.com***), then you can probably get a cable modem, too. However, you may encounter the problem of bandwidth availability. Everyone on your street shares the same allocation, so if everyone signs up and starts downloading movies, there isn't going to be much to share around.

A cable modem is up to nine times as fast as a 56k modem...

ADSL lines are undoubtedly the way that most of us will welcome broadband into our homes because they can utilise the same twisted copper pair wires that bring ordinary telephone calls into the house. They work by using digital coding techniques to squeeze up to 99 percent more capacity out of a phone line without interfering with regular phone services. All of which means that you could be simultaneously talking on the phone or sending a fax – while surfing the Web.

BT has started rolling out ADSL (***www.bt.com/openworld***) across the country, but the problem is that every single exchange in the UK has to be modified in order to offer the service to local customers. The other »

problem is that you need to be within 3km of the telephone exchange, and even then you might find that your phone line isn't up to the upgrade (they survey your line when you order ADSL, before confirming installation).

When it does work, however, ADSL (asymmetric digital subscriber line) is every bit as impressive as a cable modem. It offers similar download speeds (upwards of 512kbps) but offers much more impressive upload speeds which typically hit 256kbps (as opposed to a cable's 128kbps). Like cable it is always on and like cable you pay a single flat fee (typically about £25 a month) with no extra charges at all.

Before you rush to ***www.btopenworld.com***, however, a word of warning: BT has already had to publicly apologise for delays in processing customer orders for the service. As it stands, some 40,000 people have ADSL up and working, with BT estimating that a further 5,000 are being added to the list every week. And as of today, the telecoms giant is assuring customers that, from the time of satisfactory completion of a survey, they should be running within 15 days.

You do, of course, have a choice of ADSL supplier, with several 'rival' ISPs offering variations on the basic ADSL theme. However, as we went to press AOL UK was threatening legal action against BT, claiming that its 'ration' of ADSL installations put it in a position where it could not be competitive. Until the issue is resolved, the rate of connections available from other ISPs is dangerously close to the level of demand.

But enough of that – for now, at least. Leased lines have been around for some time. They are high speed data links installed directly from a building (typically an office since they cost so much) to a telephone exchange. The advantage of a leased line is that you get a 1:1 contention ratio (you and you alone get full bandwidth access). The disadvantage is that leased lines cost a serious amount of cash (typically about £6,000 a year for a 64k line, which is prohibitive for ordinary home users) because they require a special line to be installed. Most ISPs (including Demon and Clara.net) offer leased line services.

There are a couple of alternatives to cable, ADSL and leased lines in the form of satellite. None of these services have actually started yet, so it's difficult to report on their reliability and speeds, but the companies claim they will be every bit as fast and with none of the accessibility issues. Since all you need is a satellite dish and a converter card, anyone in the British Isles can sign up. Wireless Internet access is also being developed by a company called Tele2 (***www.tele2.co.uk***) which will sell you 1Mbps access for £65 a month. The service is live in Leicester and is being rolled out across the rest of the country.

Whatever route you take, broadband will transform your use of the Internet...imagine never hearing a modem dial-up again. And to wet your whistle, we've assembled some of the finest broadband Web content known to humanity – see right...

Wireless Internet access from tele2 comes at 1Mb per second for £65 a month

WHICH CONNECTION IS RIGHT FOR ME?

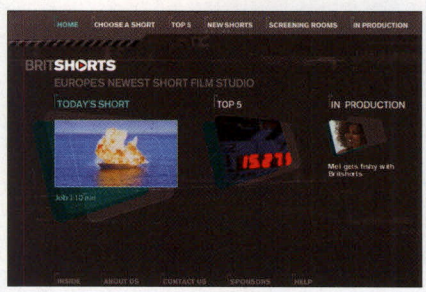
COMPANY	WEB ADDRESS	SPEED (down/up)	RENTAL (month)	ONE-OFF FEE	PC	MAC
ADSL						
BTOpenWorld	***www.btopenworld.com***	512/256	£39.99	£150	Yes	Yes
Includes 20MB of Web space and 10 email addresses						
FreeservePlus Home	***www.freeserve.com/plus***	512/256	£39.99	£150	Yes	No
Includes exclusive access to Freeserve's broadband content						
Plusnet ADSL Home	***www.plusnet.co.uk***	512/256	£45	£150	Yes	No
Includes unlimited Web space and as many email addresses as you can handle						
CABLE MODEM						
ntl broadband	***www.askntl.com/broadband***	512/128	£19.99	£149	Yes	Yes
£149 is one-off charge for cable modem; only available to existing ntl subscribers						
TeleWest	***www.blueyonder.co.uk***	512/128	£33	£50	Yes	Yes
You don't need to be a TeleWest subscriber, but you do need to have the cable passing your home						
SATELLITE						
EuroSky Internet	***www.eurosky.net***	2Mb/56k	£9.99	£126	-	-
You need an analogue Sky dish, time and patience. £126 is cost of Europe Online package.						
WIRELESS						
Tele2	***www.tele2.co.uk***	500/500	£34.99**	£149*	Yes	Yes
They install an aerial outside and a 'Speedbox' inside your premises – service is for businesses only						

* for up to two-storey building, up to 512kbps **(500Mb)

ESSENTIAL BROADBAND

The sites of the summer

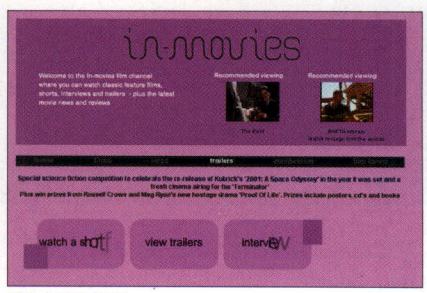
Presenting our guide to the super-enhanced URLs you'll want to check out with your new connection



BRIT SHORTS

www.britshorts.com

If you're a fan of British or European cinema, you can get a quick fix from this growing collection of choice new work complemented by interviews and trailers. And since the point of film shorts is that they are, well, short, broadband is ideal if you don't want to spend more time downloading films than watching them.



IN-MOVIES

www.in-movies.com

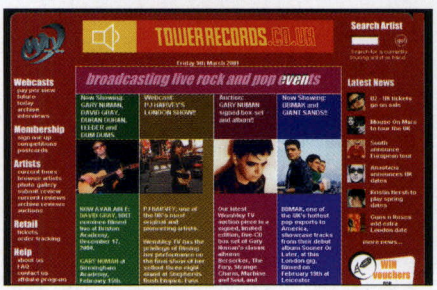
New to this site is the option to watch 'byte'-sized chunks of classic feature films from the likes of Orson Welles, which is great if you need to manage your viewing time, provided your Net access is just as efficient. You can also enjoy some 150 short films lasting as little as 60 seconds, as well as trailers for the latest block-busters and interviews with major film stars.

SIGHTSOUND *www.sightsound.com*

Downloading movies from the Internet always seems like a great way to avoid the walk to the video shop, but if you've got ordinary Web access you'll probably give up waiting and get your coat instead. Get set up with broadband and it'll take just minutes to get hundreds of different films from this site, including specially-developed full-length features.

VIRTUE TV *www.virtuetv.com*

Test drive your Broadband with Virtue TV, which brings you a good mix of pop and rock radio sessions as well as feature films and independent shorts. The impressive music channel includes an archive of concerts and interviews with big-name artists as well as a video jukebox featuring current tracks. On top of Lifestyle and Sports TV channels, there's a special section especially for those with faster access.

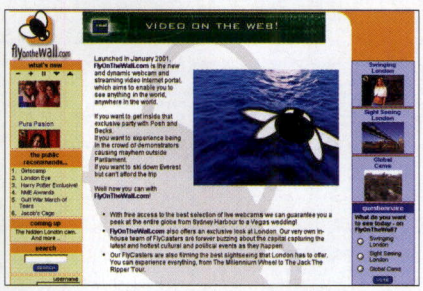


WEMBLEY TV *www.wembleytv.com*

It's frustrating enough waiting ages to download a pre-recorded gig, but a live stream is pointless unless you get to see the stage and hear the music at the same time. Enjoy both by plenty of top artists at wembleytv.com, where you can also watch gigs and interviews from their archive. Recent Webcasts have included PJ Harvey live in London, Duran Duran and David Gray.

WORLD OF DANCE *www.wod1.com*

Hear the latest dance tracks before they're released, on 'World of Dance', with you 24/7 pumping out dance, trance, electronica and techno without the interruption of advertisements or news. Check reviews of new releases and the month's playlist and make an 'equest' for your favourite track, which you can send by using the site's free email service.

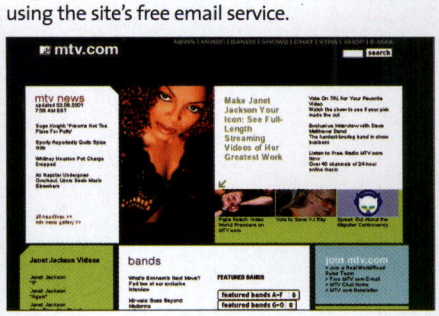


FLY ON THE WALL *www.flyonthewall.com*

An entire portal devoted to giving you access to Webcams and streamed videos of sites and events from all around the world. Go behind the scenes at some of London's key showbiz events, keep tabs on the latest news events as they happen, revel in real life US crimes and peer at fish, pandas and gorillas. Like the original Big Brother, Fly on the Wall is everywhere.

ATOM FILMS *www.atomfilms.com*

Hundreds of different short film genres and animations titles to choose from, including plenty of spoof films and cult cartoons, plus several appearances by Darren Walsh's entertaining Angry Kid. Follow the link to Shockwave (***www.shockwave.com***) for pop videos and games, all enjoyable without the frustration of mid-stream seizure. Call it cult, broadband-style.



MTV *www.mtv.com*

There's so much online at this pop and rock Mecca that it would be a travesty to let anything stop you making the most of it. Hundreds of video streams by top artists include all the Grammy Award winners, live gigs and exclusive MTV interviews. Check out the US Top 20 videos, singles and albums and download scores of recent and current chart hits.

CLUBBED.COM *www.clubbed.com*

A clubber's virtual heaven, Clubbed.com will keep your finger on the pulse of club culture the world over, from London to New York, Ibiza to Melbourne. As well as news and reports on clubbing events, record releases and topical issues, Clubbed Radio brings you the latest dance 'choons' from CN Soho Live Dance Radio, soon to expand into indie, chart and classical.

Look · Listen · Believe

LIVE is back, back as an annual show and back with all the very latest home entertainment brands and products to see, hear, touch and check out for yourself. This time we're going to The NEC, Birmingham, taking the Home Electronics Show to the heart of the country.

A smooth mix of brands will show the latest in the world of TV, DVD and video (not dead yet), both hardware and content, plus hi-fi and home cinema, MP3, games, digital cameras, personal organisers...the list goes on.

And of course it will include a choice selection of Internet brands, the physical representation of cyberspace, from ISPs to service providers with some seriously cool offerings. To whet your appetite, two already confirmed are iwantanewpc.co.uk, and you probably will, and ep-x.com who offer some fantastic mountain bikes and street gear. Now you will definitely want one of those.

Add mobile communications to the mix with 3G and bluetooth applications coming online, WAP starting to do what it is supposed to and you now have some serious convergence with other applications. How much do want from one day out?

You want more? Well we are already planning feature areas to include the ever popular Home Entertainment Zone plus two others currently under wraps.
Keep an eye on these pages for more details.

At LIVE you will see some serious products but be warned, you'll leave wanting one of something...

Look, listen, believe...*put LIVE in your diary 21-23 September 2001.*

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WANT TO KNOW MORE?

MYSELF

Martin, 28, DVD fanatic

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Internet to go

Fill dead time with the Net, thanks to the new breed of portable Web devices

THINK OF THE WASTED TIME IN YOUR life; dead hours on the bus, interminable waits at the dentist, years spent on train station platforms. Now imagine filling them: you could be catching up on your post, chatting with friends, even playing games with someone on the other side of the earth.

The technology is now in place to make all of this not just possible, but also affordable and easy to access. While the truly shirt-pocket, one-box wireless device is a short way off (see *the net now*, page 6), there's now a wealth of options in terms of matching your palmtop or laptop with a mobile that will afford instant(ish) Internet access.

It's about time, really. To date, WAP has presented a poor picture of the Internet at a snail's pace. But now, thankfully, mobile computing advances have eradicated the need for disappointing compromise.

But what should you buy? When you're looking for a portable device, give thought to your actual needs: if you simply want to send emails, forget lugging around a heavy laptop. But if you're going to be entering a lot of data, it's probably best not to rely on devices that only use handwriting recognition.

Of course, the other part of the equation is the mobile connection to the Web. With speedy GPRS mobiles still months away, the choice is between finding a landline and using a 56kbps modem or making do with GSM mobiles and their paltry data rate of around 9kbps. However, Orange has done its best to plug this gap by introducing HSCSD, which squeezes speeds of up to and over 18kbps from standard mobile phones.

We've taken a look at some of the top portable devices on the market to help you find out what is right for you.

PSION REVO PLUS £300
SIEMENS SL45 £230 *subject to contract*

www.psion.com* | *www.siemens.co.uk

★★★★★

PROS Cheap and quick to use
CONS Black and white screen; poor keyboard

Psion launched the PDA revolution and the Revo is its smallest, most Web-friendly offering to date. Its 16Mb of memory is twice the Palm m105's, and the processor is faster, too. This, combined with a good-sized (though not backlit) screen has allowed Psion to shoehorn the Opera web browser on board. It uses infrared, the simplest and easiest connection to a mobile with built-in modem (such as the fantastic SL45), but things get slow on complex sites and the landscape screen is rather small. Fortunately, it includes a separate WAP browser when you need speed. The email, word processing and spreadsheet software is top class, too, making the Revo a real bargain.

SIEMENS SL45
PROCESSOR 36MHz ARM
MEMORY 8Mb
BATTERY LIFE one week
WEIGHT 200g
SIZE 157 x 79 x 18mm

APPLE IBOOK SE £1,500
SOFT GSM MODEM £110

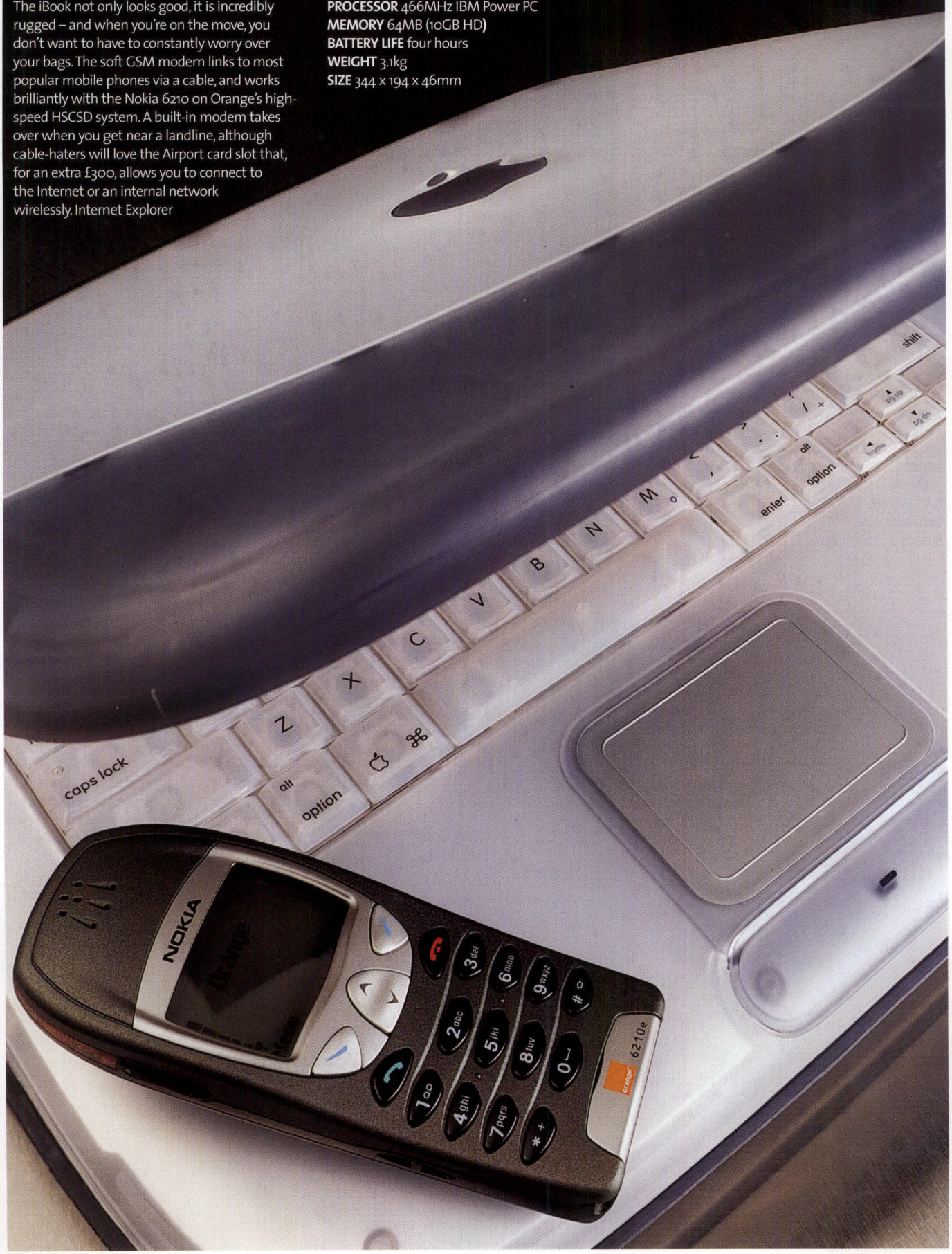
www.apple.com/uk ★★★★★

PROS Robust; stylish
CONS Heavy; not Windows-compatible

The iBook not only looks good, it is incredibly rugged – and when you're on the move, you don't want to have to constantly worry over your bags. The soft GSM modem links to most popular mobile phones via a cable, and works brilliantly with the Nokia 6210 on Orange's high-speed HSCSD system. A built-in modem takes over when you get near a landline, although cable-haters will love the Airport card slot that, for an extra £300, allows you to connect to the Internet or an internal network wirelessly. Internet Explorer and Outlook Express are supplied as standard, but Macs can have problems with Java-heavy sites. Still, the battery lasts up to six hours and will see you through a two-hour DVD with ease, while the 450MHz G3 processor is equivalent to a 700MHz Pentium III.

APPLE IBOOK SE
PROCESSOR 466MHz IBM Power PC
MEMORY 64MB (10GB HD)
BATTERY LIFE four hours
WEIGHT 3.1kg
SIZE 344 x 194 x 46mm

BEST BUY



WORDS: TOM DUNMORE; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT

PALM M105 £180
STOWAWAY KEYBOARD £80
MOTOROLA TIMEPORT 250 £240

(without contract)

www.palm.com/uk | www.motorola.co.uk

★★★★☆

PROS Easy to use; great organiser
CONS Takes a while to set up; monochrome screen

Palm's latest handheld is the closest the company has come to an online machine; it ships with the Mobile Internet Kit, which is easy to set up via a PC, even if it does take a while, and allows you to send and receive email and access Web 'clippings' simply by aiming your Palm's IR port at the phone's (a modem is available if your phone doesn't have one built in). Web clippings are halfway between WAP and the Web proper; at present there are only a few hundred sites available and they tend to be US-based, but with millions of Palm users out there this is sure to increase. The device is incredibly easy to use, and worth it just as an electronic organiser – but add the Net elements and the fantastic full-sized, fold-up keyboard and you've got an amazing setup.

PALM M105
PROCESSOR 20MHz Dragonball
MEMORY 8Mb
BATTERY LIFE two weeks
WEIGHT 126g
SIZE 79 x 118 x 180mm

HP JORNADA 720 £650

www.hp.com/uk ★★★☆☆

PROS Powerful, colourful and compatible
CONS Ugly; doesn't work with Macs

Halfway between PDAs and laptops sits HP's ultra-portable Jornada. Running a cut-down version of Windows, it features pocket versions of Microsoft's most popular applications: Internet Explorer, Word, Outlook and Excel. The keyboard is easy to use, and the 206MHz processor ensures everything proceeds apace, but it's the connections that make this so amazing . Aside from the docking station (serial or USB) it has a telephone socket and built-in modem for landlines plus PC card slot (ideal for mobile phone modems). There's even a memory card slot, making the Jornada an ideal MP3 player – if you're willing to pay the hefty price for CompactFlash cards. However, despite an infra-red connection, we couldn't set up the Jornada to work with a mobile phone.

PROCESSOR 206MHz StrongARM
MEMORY 32Mb
BATTERY LIFE nine hours
WEIGHT 510g
SIZE 95 x 189 x 34mm

fashion video

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QuickCam Web

QuickCam Traveler
mobile webcam / digital camera combi

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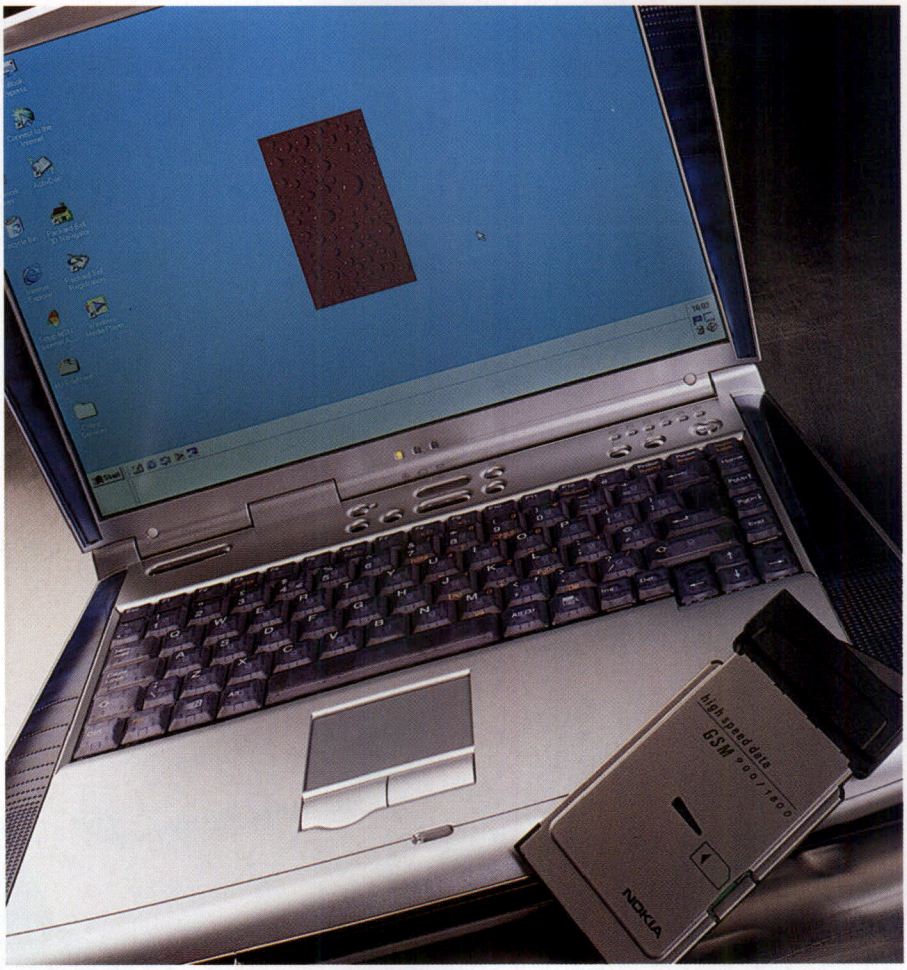
★★★★☆

PROS All you expect from a desktop in a laptop
CONS Not very portable

The ultimate 'desktop replacement' laptop, the Chrom@ weighs in at a back-breaking 4.1kg. As you'd expect from such a behemoth, the Chrom@ does it all – the 750MHz Pentium III is blazingly fast with Windows Me and the huge bundle of supplied software (including Word and Fifa 2000). Connect to the Internet via Nokia's Cardphone on Orange's speedy HSCSD system and you can browse on the crystal-clear 15in screen for hours. There's a huge variety of connections, too, including digital audio out for perfect surround sound, which means you can use the Chrom@ as the DVD player at the heart of your home entertainment system. The Chrom@ does it all, but there are lighter ways to get on the Web.

PACKARD BELL CHROM@
PROCESSOR 750MHz Pentium III
MEMORY 128Mb (20GB HD)
BATTERY LIFE 2.5 hours
WEIGHT 4.1kg
SIZE 377 x 290 x 42mm



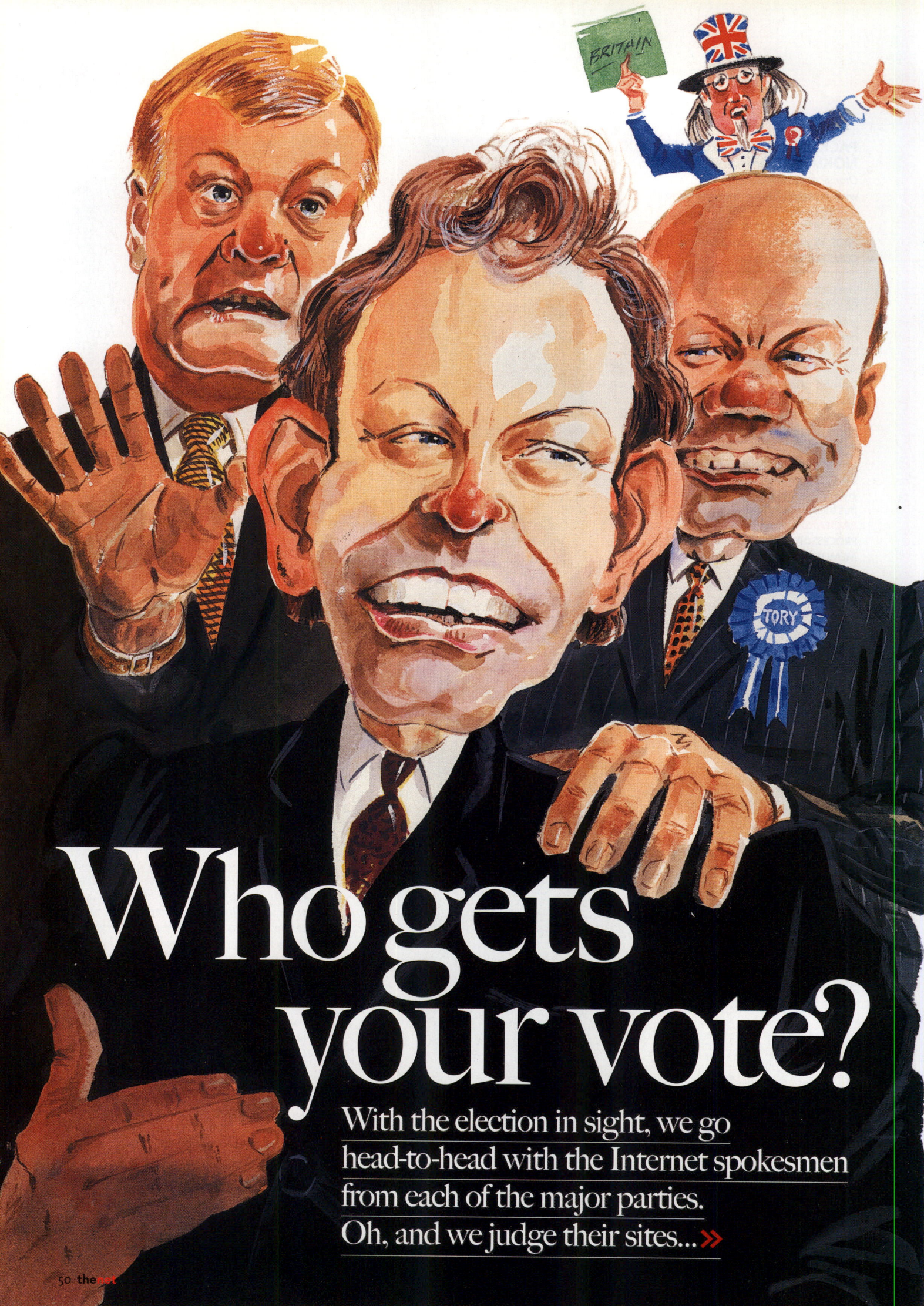
ERICSSON R380S £450 *(without contract)*

www.ericsson.co.uk ★★★☆☆

PROS Incredibly portable; phone and PDA in one
CONS Can't display HTML pages; data entry is fiddly

It looks like a normal, if slightly bulky, mobile phone. But flip open the keypad and you'll find a long, touch-sensitive screen that offers address book and diary, plus a decent sized WAP browser and, most usefully, an email programme. You can set this to download just the headers in your inbox, and then you can choose which messages (and attachments) to download, saving on your bill. A stylus, tucked away in the battery when not in use, allows you to pick out letters on a virtual keyboard or try out the surprisingly good handwriting recognition. And like a proper PDA, it links to your PC so you can back-up all your important information. All this in one tiny case. The only downer is the lack of HTML Web browsing.

PROCESSOR n/a
MEMORY 2Mb
BATTERY LIFE up to four hours talk time, 54 hours organiser time
WEIGHT 164g
SIZE 130 x 50 x 26mm



Who gets your vote?

With the election in sight, we go head-to-head with the Internet spokesmen from each of the major parties. Oh, and we judge their sites... »

Labour Party

From the off, Labour built the Internet into all areas of policy, from teaching to business. The party's '97 election manifesto promised to link all schools to the 'Information Superhighway', and the Government now says that by 2004 there will be half a million more PCs in classrooms. Since taking office they've appointed an e-envoy (**www.e-envoy.gov.uk**) to oversee their e-commerce initiatives and to speed up the 'networking' of Britain; and the end of February saw the launch of the UK Online portal, billed as a world first that would revolutionise access to Government information. In the near future, the site promises to be a portal for registering births and deaths, and submitting documents such as passport applications and tax returns. To top it all, the e-envoy's *UK Online* report, published at the end of last year, promised an extra £3.8bn to improve Internet services for government and business.

All good news? Not quite. Labour has come under major fire for failing to deregulate the telecoms industry and roll out broadband access fast enough (see page 7), and for the failure of the Inland Revenue's online filing system last year.

ON THE SPOT

PATRICIA HEWITT *E-MINISTER*

the net **spoke to Patricia Hewitt, minister in charge of the information society, to find out if Labour really is an e-government and, if so, what it would have in store for the Internet if it gained a second term in office**

How would a Labour Government police the Internet in the future?

The Government recognises that confidentiality and privacy are important to users of the Internet, particularly in relation to business communications and for individuals who buy goods. Equally, we all recognise law enforcement needs to be able to investigate serious criminal and terrorist activities.

We do not tolerate illegal racist material and child pornography offline, and there is no reason to tolerate it online either. Restriction of freedom of expression on the Internet is no different to freedom of expression in any other context: it must be clearly justified and in line with the Human Rights Act.

Do the police have the right to monitor my activities?

The police may investigate e-mail communications only in the investigation of a serious crime after having obtained a properly authorised warrant issued by the Secretary of State. Unless you are engaging in serious criminal activities there is no reason to believe your communications may be monitored.

What further commitments are you planning to make towards the 'networking' of Britain?

On 11 September 2000, the Prime Minister announced the first 600 UK On-line centres, aimed at helping tackle the digital divide by improving access to the Internet in many rural and deprived areas. [There are now] over 1,200 centres in place.

In addition, by April 2001, 60 percent of libraries will be online. By the end of 2002, we will have 6,000 UK On-line centres open and all public libraries online.

An essential part of creating an infrastructure that will deliver the telecoms required to achieve 'networked' Britain is the roll out broadband services. We are also strongly promoting competition in the broadband market to bring down prices.

We don't tolerate racism offline... why should we do it online?

What are your policies with regard to education and the Internet?

Over 20,000 schools are already connected to the Internet – most secondary schools and the majority of primaries. So we are well on the way to link all schools to the Internet by 2002. As it is a statutory requirement that ICT is part of the National Curriculum, all pupils are receiving ICT training.

How do you envisage citizens interacting with Government through the Internet in the future?

We see the Internet as an important tool in promoting democracy. Citizens can already interact with Government via the UK On-line Website (**www.ukonline.gov.uk**). Using 'Life Episodes' as templates for visitors to the site to access the parts of Government most applicable to their needs, we are able to help the public to make the best use of Government On-line. Life Episodes focus on common occurrences, such as moving house or having a baby, where Government services can provide help.

There are many issues to be addressed before we get to the point where we can do such things as vote online, but we are working towards getting as much as the democratic process online as possible.

Patricia Hewitt is MP for Leicester West, and Minister of State at the Department of Trade and Industry. Among other roles, she has special responsibility for e-commerce and the information society. She has two Web sites:

www.patricia-hewitt-mp.co.uk

www.patriciahewitt.labour.co.uk

LABOUR PARTY WEB SITE

www.labour.org.uk

This is the slickest of all the political parties' sites by a long shot. Banners dominate, generally bearing self-congratulations or attacks on the opposition. Just below the banner at the top of the home page you'll find a link to the video archive – easily the site's unique selling point. There's even a comprehensive collection of videos from the Labour Party Conference; you can choose a day and a speaker and relive every moment from the comfort of your desktop (or you could get a life).

If you're frequently stuck for gift ideas, be sure to bookmark the shop where you can pick up diaries, jewellery, kitchenware, and other objects of desire. You can't buy an MP, though.

Clicking on the Policies link on the fixed top menu allows you to read policies by issue or geographical area. It's a clever idea, but either option invites a barrage of statistics to invade your screen which are more overwhelming than illuminating; and if you choose to find out what the Labour party is up to in your area, you might just end up getting the feeling that a sly applet has inserted the name of your town at appropriate places into a standard template.

Conservative Party

Government must get out of the way fast to let e-commerce flourish,' proclaimed William Hague in a speech to a Conservative Business Liaison Unit at the end of last year, and whether the issue is Internet crime or Internet access in our schools, the Tory policy is one of minimum intervention. When Alan Duncan, Tory spokesman on technology spoke to the Conservative Party Conference in Bournemouth, in February, he said: 'The Internet did not need government to get it going – and the last thing it needs is government to get in its way. We favour the minimum of intervention and the maximum possible freedom.'

ON THE SPOT

ALAN DUNCAN *CONSERVATIVE MP*

the net **spoke to Alan Duncan to find out if a Tory Government would have any part to play in the development of the Internet in the UK**

How would a Conservative Government police the Internet in the future?

Of course the police and agencies need the power to prevent fraud and bear down on illegal activity like child pornography. In other respects, though, we want the lightest possible regulatory touch, so that new businesses can flourish without interference. By and large we think the industry will be more than equipped so that people can trade over their laptop with confidence. What's more, there's so much information and so much activity it's going to be very difficult to police, which in many respects is a good thing, because it introduces a measure of global freedom in some areas where the state has been far too bossy.

It will, however, make the law of libel almost impossible to exercise. When people are completely outrageous there should be the power to shut down their site, probably by asking for the co-operation of service providers, or putting pressure to bear on them.

Do the police have the right to monitor my activities?

There is no justification for playing with data and interfering with an individual's activity where there is no suspected breaking of the law. On the other hand, of course, the state must have some powers to stop terrorism and the ghastliness of child pornography, but striking a balance is going to be very difficult.

What, if any, commitments are you planning to make towards the 'networking' of Britain?

Oftel are in charge of the unbundling of the local loop. It's been slower than planned but it should all happen this year and the sooner the better. There are problems particularly in rural areas where there are Internet black spots, and the recent fixed wireless broadband auction was a complete flop so rural areas who are often very well suited to the creation of a Net reliant business find they have neither the speed nor the capacity which they need. This has to be remedied and the quicker the better. But, having said that, most of the development of the network will happen naturally – as it did with telephone, roads and railways in the past.

The main thing is that politicians should shut their mouths and let the world get on with it. Nothing irks me more than politicians trying to claim credit for the success of others.

Politicians should shut their mouths and let the world get on with it

This government are doing it all the time, they talk the talk, don't walk the walk. Posts such as e-envoys and e-ministers are a bit gimmicky frankly; I don't approve of these appointments which are part civil servant and part agency, and the nature of their responsibilities needs to be tidied up.

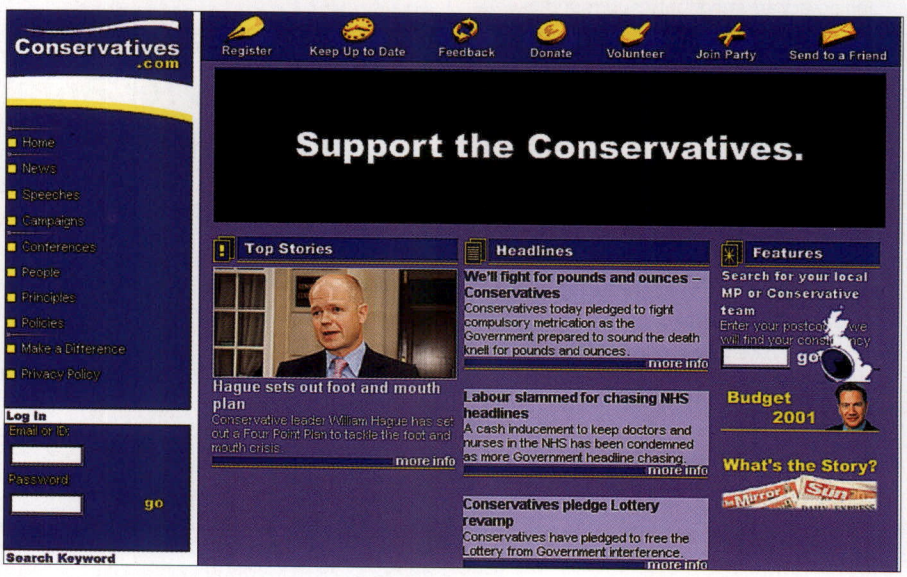
What are your policies with regard to education and the Internet?

This is happening. It's not that difficult to get connected. Every school I go into has got lots of computers, and the only problem is that the kids seem to know more about them than the teachers. Schools can all afford them.

How do you envisage citizens interacting with Government through the Internet in the future?

The more familiar people become with their computers, the more services government should be able to provide on them. This should allow for tax returns, benefit applications, any kind of paper trail than can be replaced by a screen should become a natural part of citizens' dialogue with government. I do not approve of voting online. The point about voting is that it should be an equitable system available to all, and if people can't be bothered to walk a few hundred yards to the polling station, then I question whether they deserve a vote. There is a problem that democracy is becoming very detached from real issues and real people, and we don't want to alienate people further by turning it into a sort of TV show exercise in button pressing. Nonetheless, the Net is already becoming an important campaigning tool for politicians.

Alan Duncan, Conservative MP for Rutland and Melton since 1992 has been described as the 'Bonsai Heseltine' because of his stature, style and combativeness. ***www.alanduncan.org.uk***



CONSERVATIVES OFFICIAL SITE

www.conservatives.com

A professional site, this; graphics heavy but lightning fast. The front page is dominated by a banner shouting 'Support the Conservatives', although it changes regularly to take digs at Labour. The main frame highlights a top story, followed by a trail of news headlines which are all variants on 'William Hague is brilliant', or 'Tony Blair is rubbish'. There's something intrinsically funny about party political press releases written as if they were statements of facts.

Clicking on Policies takes you to the heart of the site: Believing in Britain, a summary of Tory plans for Britain which you can download in .pdf format. Click on Campaigns to find out what the Conservatives see as the main issues of the day. Few surprises here:if you want to help keep the pound or support lower taxes, you can volunteer to join a campaign by clicking a link at the bottom of the page.

The search engine is excellent. If you want to know what the Conservatives think about a particular issue, type in a keyword and the search engine will trawl the archive of press releases and speeches. All in all, fairly impressive, no razzmatazz, sober and functional; it does exactly what you might expect it to do, and does it well. »

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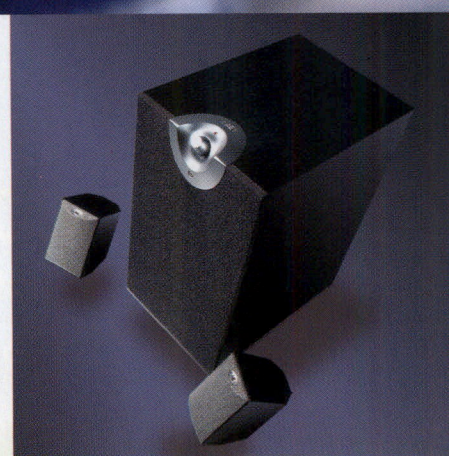

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Liberal Democrats

In March this year, Liberal Democrat MP Paul Burstow alerted police to the plight of a 12-year-old girl who had been molested after meeting a man through an Internet chat room. He immediately called for new laws to prevent paedophiles ensnaring victims over the Internet. The Lib Dems have clearly given considerable thought to how the Internet should be policed, and although they're committed to striking a balance between preventing and fighting Internet crime on the one hand, and preserving freedom of speech in a democratic Net on the other, they're not afraid to take the gloves off when they deem it necessary. Over to you, Messrs Hughes and Allan...

ON THE SPOT

SIMON HUGHES *HOME AFFAIRS SPOKESMAN*

the net **spoke to Simon Hughes, the Lib Dem's Home Affairs spokesman, about crime and the Internet, and to Richard Allan, employment and technology spokesman, about the Party's wider vision for the Internet in the UK**

How would a Liberal Democrat Government police the Internet in the future?

SH: There is clearly a balance needed between tackling serious crime, encouraging a thriving e-commerce sector and protecting fundamental civil liberties, but it's far from straightforward. International agreement must be a central part of tackling abuse of electronic communications.

Do the police have the right to monitor my activities?

SH: We intend to improve safeguards against the misuse of surveillance and interception powers by law enforcement agencies. We will replace the system of warrants approved by Ministers with a system of approval by judges, to remove any conflicts of interest and to increase accountability. We believe that there should be a presumption in favour of an individual's freedom from intrusion into their private life and that it should be up to the Government to prove the need for it.

What, if any, commitments are you planning to make towards the 'networking' of Britain?

RA: We believe that Britain should be networked more widely...people of all ages, not just the young, should be encouraged to use the Internet as an integral part of their lives.

What are your policies with regard to education and the Internet?

RA: We believe that the Internet is a vital part of education. Our manifesto makes a commitment to invest more money in getting schools online and providing schools with up to date equipment.

How do you envisage citizens interacting with Government through the Internet in the future?

SH: We believe in extending access to government services through the Internet, making government sites more interactive. We'd want to allow more form filling, and contacting departments through email and so forth. If the Internet could be used to make voting easier, and to encourage more people to vote, then that's something we'd support.

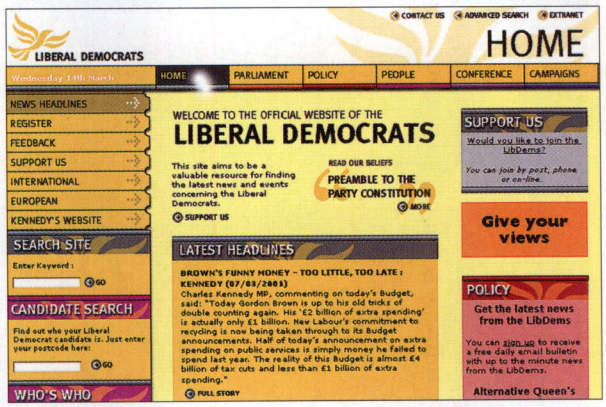
Simon Hughes, MP for North Southwark & Bermondsey, had been in Parliament since 1983 and is one of their most high-profile members of the Lib Dems. ***www.simonhughesmp.org.uk***

Richard Allan, MP for Sheffield Hallam, is chair of the information select committee.

LIBERAL DEMOCRATS OFFICIAL SITE

www.libdems.org.uk

This neat, text-based site is particularly impressive in its attempt to get feedback from voters on hot topics. At the time of writing, the Party's health team under Nick Harvey were asking visitors to answer a survey as part of their assessment of 'the risk to health services from planned Tory spending cuts'.



If you want to receive the regular Lib Dem e-news, you can register on the main page, where you'll also find the main menu, which offers political news, policy briefings and campaign updates. Clicking on 'People' takes you to bios of all the Lib Dems MPs, complete with very smiley photos – which sum up this site nicely. It's noticeably more friendly and down to earth than the other two main party sites, though no less polished.

SITES FROM THE OTHER ELECTION CONTENDERS

THE BEST OF THE REST»

SCOTTISH NATIONAL PARTY

www.snp.org

Instead of taking you to the well-designed regular site, the URL redirected us to a hastily-thrown-together General Election site with a third rate design and a series of dull 'news' articles piled on top of each other. The menu has a practical focus, with links to information on registering for a postal vote and the SNP in your area, followed by a list of links to policy statements on education, health and crime. No surprises there then.

PLAID CYMRU

www.plaidcymru.org

An intelligently-designed site. The first page is split into news in the middle and information down both borders. On the left are links to information relating to the Welsh National Assembly, Westminster and Europe; and on the right links to information about the party, its history and a series of well-written press releases. Downloads, coming soon, will include 'portable' policy documents, videos of party political broadcasts, and regular Web casts.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOUR PARTY

www.sdlp.ie

The amateurish montage of political portraits that greets you when you log on doesn't augur well. Design-wise the site is a disaster, with the aesthetics of a Parish newsletter. Scroll down for links to news alongside fuzzy photos, read the manifesto, or brush-up on the history of Northern Ireland. The policies section is worth looking at, with well written mini-manifestos, which leave you in no doubt as to what you'd be voting for.

GREENS

www.greenparty.org.uk

On this well-organised, no frills, easy-to-navigate site you'll find clear links to a library of usefulreports on environmental issues, plus lots of reactions to political developments which relate to environmental issues.

SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY

www.swp.org.uk

This is a scissors, paper and glue site. Not pretty, but a useful port of call for supporters, including details of the latest demos and resources for activists – leaflets, petitions, and posters – all jumbled in with links to campaign issues and journals such as the *Socialist Review* and *International Socialism*.

NATURAL LAW PARTY OF GREAT BRITAIN

www.natural-law-party.org.uk

Disappointingly, there's no Flash sequence of yogic flying, but there is the latest news from a Natural Law perspective, party info, manifestos, biographies and an details of the 'scientific' thinking behind the party.

Word to the wise

E-commerce was built on buying books – but is it still worth ditching the high street in favour of Amazon et al?

THE WORLD OF ONLINE BOOKS HASN'T quite lowered itself to engage in the same price-slashing warfare as Internet CD stores. Whereas it's hard to find a site that'll take more than £12.99 off you for a chart CD these days (see *the net*, March 2001), there are plenty of online bookstores that'll cheerfully accept a hardback cover price of £16.99 for a current best-seller, and then add a couple of quid at least for delivery (okay, books are heavier). That said, for the book-buying consumer, there are plenty of bargains to be had online; you just have to know where to find them.

Books have long been one of e-commerce's staples and the sector is different from any other in that it has one behemoth of a major player in the shape of Amazon. Around 2,739,000 people in the UK accessed the .co.uk and .com Amazon sites last November, according to research company MMXI, whose figures also showed it to be the number one online shopping brand in Australia, Canada and the US, and in the top five of Brazil, Denmark, France and Japan.

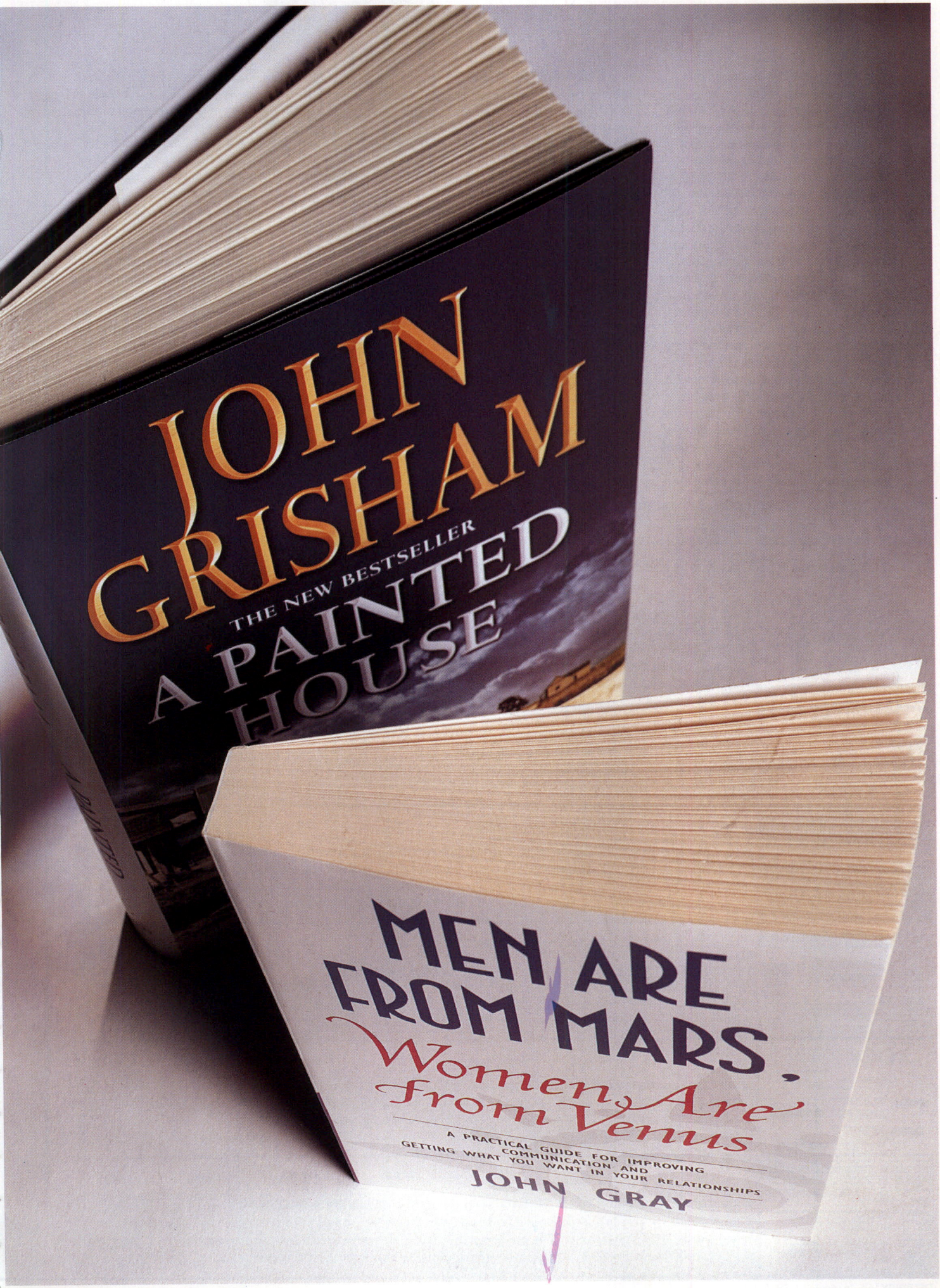
It's in no small way thanks to Amazon that the online bookshop sector is such a developed one, with most stores having ironed out any problems by now, and offering a fairly hassle-free shopping experience. Obviously some are better than others and surely Amazon can't always be the best...can it?

We chose a current best-selling hardback, *A Painted House* by John Grisham and a paperback perennial, John Gray's *Men are from Mars, Woman are from Venus*, and ventured into 12 online bookstores with credit card in hand to see who offers the best bargains, service and general book-buying experience.

We had no problems finding the books in stock at most of the stores and in most cases received a confirmation email of the order within the hour (always print out these emails along with any other order numbers/receipts that you're sent digitally). Even more pleasing, the vast majority of books arrived within five working days.

We soon discovered, though, that there »

WORDS: SUE WEEKES; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT


JOHN GRISHAM
THE NEW BESTSELLER
A PAINTED HOUSE
MEN ARE FROM MARS,
Women Are from Venus
A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR IMPROVING COMMUNICATION AND GETTING WHAT YOU WANT IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS
JOHN GRAY

was an inherent problem with one of our books. Had we realised that an entire industry had sprung up around John Gray's now legendary self-help relationship guide, we would have probably plumped for a) a book with a shorter title and b) one that never begat a sequel, prequel or offspring in general (in fact, *Kes* would have been ideal).

The reason for this is simple: unless you're seriously into browsing for books (and let's face it, that's what high street stores are still good for), you'll probably be finding your book via the site's search mechanism. Keying in *Painted House* nearly always threw up a similarly titled tome by queen of the paint effect Jocasta Innes but it was easy to differentiate between the two. However, key in *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* and you get a myriad of variations on the theme in hard- and softback. Gray has also published *Men are from Mars*; *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus Book of Days*; *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus, Children are from Heaven*), not to mention audio books of the same name and boxed calendars. Being not initially aware of all the variations, we ordered the incorrect version at four of the sites (BOL, Countrybookshop, Waterstones and WH Smith). Our suspicions weren't aroused on the confirmation email because we thought they were just using an abridged version of the name for ease.

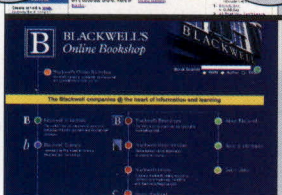
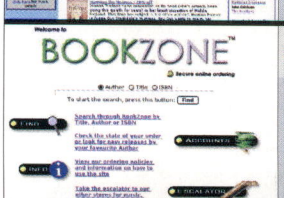
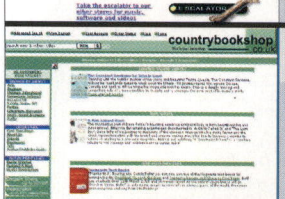
All the shops were happy to exchange the book as long as it was returned in a specified time. Searching by a book's ISBN number avoids this and is worth doing if there are a number of variations of the book.

While it will be hard to ever convince a diehard book boffin that browsing and buying online is as pleasurable as spending hours immersed in a musty, dusty bookshop, it's worth pointing out that online bookstores have gone to quite a lot of trouble to enhance the book-buying experience. User reviews, for instance, are a great way of finding out what real people think of the latest book rather than some stuffy critic, while free-to-read first chapters let you dip into the opening of a book just as you would in a bookshop. Some sites let you cut to interviews of authors and you'll even find signed editions available for sale at others.

User reviews are a great way of finding out what real people think

Some techies would have it that we'll soon be downloading eBooks and contributing to interactive e-novels (see p128) rather than surfing the Net for the best price on a John Le Carre. New media research company Forrester predicts that 17.5 percent of publishing industry revenue will come from eBooks, custom-printed and textbooks, but we reckon it'll be a while before the Amazons and BOLs of this world join the ranks of the antiquarian booksellers. So, in the meantime at least, you might as well read on...

HOW DO THE BOOKSELLERS COMPARE?

	NAME	GRISHAM	JOHN GRAY	P&P	TOTAL	DELIVERY (p)	DELIVERY (a)
	ALPHABETSTREET	£13.59	£7.99	Free	£21.58	1-2 days	2 days
	www.alphabetstreet.co.uk The literary arm of the Streets Online empire Lots of choice and lots of offers, plus audio clips and eBooks to download, and first chapter tasters to read before you buy. Its one-click Ezy Buy system reduces buying times by a good few minutes once you've registered and input your credit card details first time round. Free delivery but the prices of both of our chosen books could have been keener.						
	AMAZON	£8.49	£4.99	£3.34	£16.82	1-2 days	1 day
	www.amazon.co.uk Synonymous with books on the Internet The world's best-known online store is hard to fault: its price for the Grisham undercut some by over £8 and it gave us the best price on Gray's book. It also delivered in the shortest time and is one of the easiest e-commerce sites to use. If it's bestsellers you're after, the Hot 100 is compulsory reading and the user reviews are always worth a look.						
	BLACKWELL'S	£16.99	£9.99	Free	£26.98	1-3 days	3 days
	www.blackwells.co.uk Academic publisher par excellence – but expensive for mainstream lit Cleanly designed site but slow to access when we dropped by. Not our choice for bestsellers since it's not Blackwell's style to indulge in in-yer-face discounting on populist titles on its home page and we paid full cover price for both books. However, with '100 years of academic excellence', anyone into serious reading or heavyweight tomes should drop by.						
	BOL	£11.89	£7.99	£2.95	£22.83	1-2 days	2 days
	www.uk.bol.com Online presence for publishing giant Bertelsmann Price-wise BOL just lost out on silver-medal to Tesco but its customer service was efficient, and we'd give it another chance since it's easy-to-use and was offering 50 percent off bestsellers when we dropped by. There's user reviews and BOL uses its publishing clout to secure specials and exclusives for customers.						
	BOOKZONE	£16.99	£8.99 not ordered	£3.16	£20.15 exc Gray	not specified	4 days
	www.bookzone.co.uk Book department of CD, Video and Software Zone Bookzone's simple design smacks of low-overheads but sadly they aren't reflected in the price. We had to pay the full whack for *A Painted House* plus £3.16 for delivery. The site told us our second choice wasn't available, but we returned to search with the ISBN number and two books popped up, telling us one was available and one wasn't. Confused, we didn't order it.						
	COUNTRYBOOKS	£16.99	£5.99	£1.90	£24.88	1-2 days	1 day
	www.countrybookshop.co.uk Personal service from the middle of the Peak District Who said there's no personal service online? At the Countrybookshop you're assigned a person who tracks and despatches your order (our thanks go to Darren). This was one of the shops where we ordered the wrong *Men are from Mars*... we emailed straight back and an assistant replied within the hour saying we could exchange within 14 days.						

BEST FOR VALUE

BEST FOR CHOICE

DELIVERY (p) = promised; **DELIVERY** (a) = actual

'IT'S JR HARTLEY...'

WHERE TO TRACK DOWN THOSE HARD-TO-FIND TOMES

ADVANCED BOOK EXCHANGE

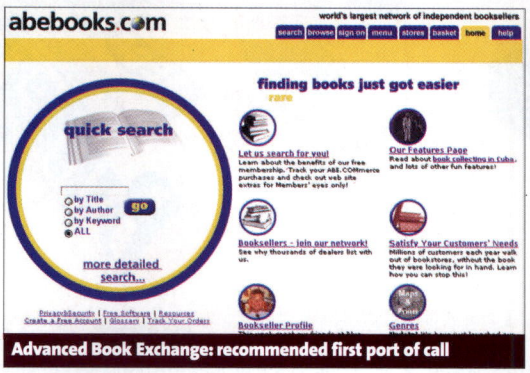
www.abebooks.com

The Advanced Book Exchange represents a huge network of independent booksellers. Its home page opens with a quick search facility but after keying in Thomas Hardy and being given 5,366 choices, we opted for the more advanced engine. Even our quick search found us a coveted 1928 first edition of Hardy's *Winter Words In Various Moods and Metres*, complete with original green cloth and gilt – for an affordable £40.

BIBLIOFIND

www.bibliofind.com

Bibliofind offers over 20 million old, used, and rare books from thousands of booksellers around the world. The site opens with the search box which we used to seek an early edition of F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. It found us a 1953 edition in New York; not as early as we wanted, but not bad as a first stab.



Advanced Book Exchange: recommended first port of call

A BOOK FOR ALL REASONS

www.abfar.co.uk

This site specialises in fiction authors from the first half of the 20th century and has a 'reasonable stock level of historical, maritime and war fiction', along with a goodly crop of great reads on Norfolk and Suffolk (it's based in Lowestoft). There's also an excellent glossary of book terminology. No secure server but you can order via email.

COUNTRYBOOKS

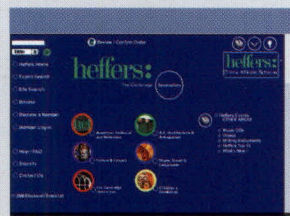
www.countrybooks.co.uk

The temptation to key in 'J R Hartley' in the fishing section was overpowering but we resisted such clichéd, childish behaviour (and anyway, JHR Bazley's 1933 first edition of *Fun with the Fishing Rod* sounded a lot more action-packed). A great site for books related to the country and country sports. Includes a free, no-obligation book search.

MR MAC

www.rmcd.demon.co.uk

A very simple site that does the job, and if you can't find what you want from the search engine, Mr Mac himself will help for free, with no obligation to buy. A Stanley Matthews *Football Album* and early Penguin and Pelican classics are among the gems here.

	NAME	GRISHAM	GRAY	P&P	TOTAL	DELIVERY (p)	DELIVERY (a)
	HEFFERS	£14.99	£9.99	Free	£24.98	1-3 days	2 days

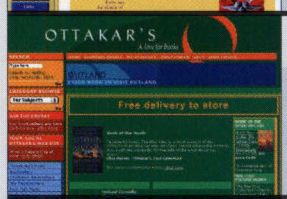
www.heffers.co.uk From the Blackwell's portfolio

Pretty much identical buying experience to Blackwell's. However, while both books were full cover price when we bought them, *A Painted House* came through as £14.99 on our receipt. A pleasant surprise but still collectively a good bit more expensive compared with other sites. Like Blackwell's, the Heffers site has a clean interface, we just wish it moved a bit faster.

	JAMESTHIN	£9.99	£9.99	£4.95	£24.93	not specified	2 days

www.jamesthin.co.uk From the established Scottish publisher

The Scottish bookstore gave us the best price on *A Painted House* after Amazon, and offered 30 percent off a list of bestsellers. Easy-to-navigate interface nice touches including an in-depth author's gallery. Good for obscure (or common) Scottish titles. Delivery was one of the most expensive but the books were extremely well packed – which means a lot to bookish types.

	OTTAKERS	£13.59	£9.99	£2.95	£26.53	1-2 days	1 day

www.ottakers.co.uk This site takes a lively magazine approach

Things did not start well – we had problems placing the order on a Macintosh and so used the 'Get me the Manager' facility. A patient Webmaster took us through the nicely designed site screen by screen – and it worked perfectly. The books then arrived in a day, but the pricing could have been more competitive.

	TESCO	£10.19	£5.99	£2.95	£19.13	not specified	1 day

www.tesco.com/books Don't overlook the retail giant when it comes to books

The only site to give Amazon a run for its money overall and certainly one to watch if you're price checking bestsellers. Tesco is one of the UK's e-commerce success stories and its site is easy to use and quick to navigate. Delivery was speedy, too. Our only gripe: we had to register our Clubcard to claim our all-important loyalty points, which disrupted the buying process.

	WATERSTONES	£11.89	£9.99	£3.25	£25.13	2-3 days	2 days

www.waterstones.co.uk Online wing of the high street giant

Waterstones changed the perception of book buying in the high street with its in-store cafés. A similar amount of effort clearly goes into the content of the site, which is well set-out. However, pricing could be a bit more competitive, although delivery charges were average at £2.25 per package, plus 50p per book.

	WH SMITH	£10.19	£8.99	£3.24	£22.42	2-3 days	5 days

www.whsmith.co.uk WH Smith's Web presence

Plenty of topical offers on the home page (Mother's Day, World Book Day, etc) with WHS almost taking a magazine approach to its home page. There are certainly plenty of discounts winking at the book-buyer. In terms of value for money in our test, it was average overall and with delivery at five days it certainly lagged behind many of the other big names.

CAPPUCCINO MAKER £100

Froth away to your heart's content with this rather chic cappuccino machine. It can be yours within 5 days with free delivery from ***www.whittard.com***

SWEETS 70p AND UP!

Imagine our delight when this lot turned up in the office. Visit the UN of sweets at ***www.cybercandy.co.uk*** for the ultimate sugar high. Delivery in 2 days.

Retailtherapy»

:// We suffer for you lot – a combined weight gain of 11 stones after checking the candy was edible...

PIONEER DV737 DVD PLAYER £500.08

DVD players don't get much better than this snazzy number, and prices don't get much lower than at ***www.empiredirect.co.uk***. Delivery in 2 days, £7.99 p&p.

ROME2 MP3 PLAYER £149.95

Slip this multi-talented MP3 player into a cassette deck to play...or use it as a personal stereo. Visit ***www.paramountzone.com***; delivery in 3 days, £3.95 p&p.

TOP BUY

GAME BOY £58.99

There's now so many great Game Boy games it's a shame to leave them to the kids. Titles like Cannon Fodder have thoroughly adult gameplay – check them out at ***UKgameboy.com***. Delivery costs vary.

WORDS: CLAIRE MCHATTIE; PICTURES: NICK WRIGHT

JEWELLERY FROM £21.50

These Mackintosh-inspired designs are just a small part of the fine Scottish jewellery at ***www.baxtersjewellers.com***. Delivery within 7 days, p&p is £2.50.

FOLK ART $18

Get ready for the Day of the Dead – check out the Mexican art scene at ***www.buymexicanfolkart.com***. Goods arrive quickly, postal charges vary.

GAME £44.99

Spend your days creating carnage and mayhem courtesy of this rather charming game, available from ***www.eidosinteractive.co.uk***. Delivery varies.

TRAINERS £100

The marathon is racing up, so get the footwear – like these nifty asics shoes – sorted at ***www.sweatshop.co.uk***. Delivery within 5 days, p&p varies.

SIMPLE GUIDELINES FOR PAINLESS ONLINE PURCHASING

TOP TIPS FOR ONLINE SHOPPING>>

CHECK THAT THE SITE IS SECURE

A small padlock will appear in the bottom left of your browser to show that you can safely send credit card details through the site. Your Web browser will also tell you whether a site is secure or not when you enter it.

SHOP WITH BRAND-NAME COMPANIES

As with shopping in the real world, you're better off with a company you've actually heard of – and these days, most big name brands own their Web addresses (so you can be sure that ***www.marksandspencer.com*** is, in fact, M&S).

PRINT THE CONTRACT

This is the only permanent record of your purchase, so make sure you keep it, along with your order number, billing address and other details. And here's a fact to put your mind at rest: if it's a UK site, you have the same consumer rights as you do in the high street.

NEVER SEND ANYTHING BY EMAIL

Don't send card details by email – it can be intercepted.

CHECK DELIVERY TIMES AND CHARGES

Companies should tell you the delivery charge, if there is one, on their site. If you're in the Highlands and Islands or Ireland, you may find free delivery doesn't apply.

IF IT GOES WRONG, DON'T WORRY

Contrary to scare stories, online shopping is safer and very often cheaper than traditional methods – and it's in the store's interest to sort out problems quickly.

PHONE OUR SALES TEAM: 0207 409 0409
build a solution online @ www.iarna.net

application web hosting

NT Domain Hosting
200MB Disk Space
PoP3 and Browser Email
ODBC/DSN Servers
Frontpage Extensions
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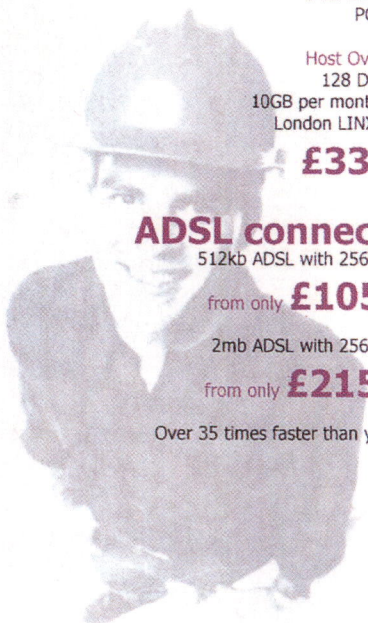
Over 35 times faster than your modem!



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* all prices exclude VAT and are subject to change. some solutions may require a setup charge

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WHAT WEBSITE?

The Best of the Web

@ CHANNELS://

> MUSIC 64
Move over, Fatboy – we list the cream of the mixing sites

> MOVIES 66
Check what's showing at the picture house and book tickets – all online

> TRAVEL 70
Drive with confidence on the Continent, thanks to route planners

> SPORT 72
Formula 1 is on the grid, so follow the form on the Internet

> SOCIETY 76
Silver surfers are a growing group, and we've got the best sites to visit

> LEARNING 78
No more speaking slowly and loudly when abroad with our language sites…

> JOBS 82
Looking for a bit on the side? The Web can help with part-time employment

> MONEY 84
We test the online banks so you can save (or spend) with ease

> THE DIRECTORY 86
Looking for a particular site? Don't waste time searching – just check out our list of addresses

SPORT Follow the Grand Prix action online at the best F1 sites

TRAVEL Plan routes online

MUSIC Mixing the Net groove

FOCUS:// Mixing sites

Log on, be the next Fatboy Slim

We bring you the best places to mix the tunes like a top DJ (Cream not included)

Norman: it all began with a 56K modem...

GETOUTTHERE

www.getoutthere.bt.com ★★★★

While British Telecom's online outlet for untapped talent and creativity mainly deals with competitions to find the best MP3 per month, it has an impressive array of tools to play around on and create your own masterpiece from scratch. The downloadable Drum Machine is a good enough place to start, with enough pre-programmed beats to satisfy the most demanding of keyboard sticksmen. The Cuts And Beats section provides the chance to fiddle around with samples and drum loops made by the fair hands of renowned funk-hop band, The Freestylers. And then there's the simply-titled The Mixer, which gives a neat, uncomplicated introduction to the delights to be found within an online mixing desk. With a few days' work, there's no reason why you won't be able to submit your own glorious creation for the celebrity panel to judge.

TURNTABLES

www.turntables.de ★★★★★

One of the best-looking music sites on the Net, Turntables ignores the traditional complicated terminology of mix sites in favour of straightforward fun. Go to the recently built 'New Skool' version of the site and you're confronted with a visual Flash feast of neutral tones and neat hip hop cartoons before entering the DJ arena complete with bouncing crowd. Choose your beats, cue the record then scratch away enjoying the whoops of approval from the audience. It may not take much musical skill to get to the level of Grandmaster Flash, but at least it's not your own records you're destroying.

HITSQUAD

www.hitsquad.com ★★★★

Go to any DJ discussion forum and Hitsquad comes up time and time again as one of the finest resource sites for online DJs. Whether it's the thousands of free MP3 downloads, the readily available mixing software or the opportunity to pick the brains of thousands of online DJs worldwide in the chat rooms, Hitsquad is a fuss-free Mecca for the more seriously-minded beat creator. And should you have ambitions beyond keeping the neighbours awake each night, there's a section in which you can advertise your talents and scout round for possible collaborators around the globe. Homelands here you come.

MADONNA OFFICIAL

www.madonnamusic.com ★★★

If mixing obscure MP3s or using lumbering home-made dance beats isn't giving you the required amount of DJ dignity or glamour, then Madonna's official site may have the answer. Here you can remix and generally tinker around with tracks off her critically-acclaimed *Music* album without asking the lady's permission (although selling the subsequent mixes may not make you her favourite person). Even taking into account her Mockney husband, Madonna is still the hottest female musical property on two legs – and has been in plenty of demand since

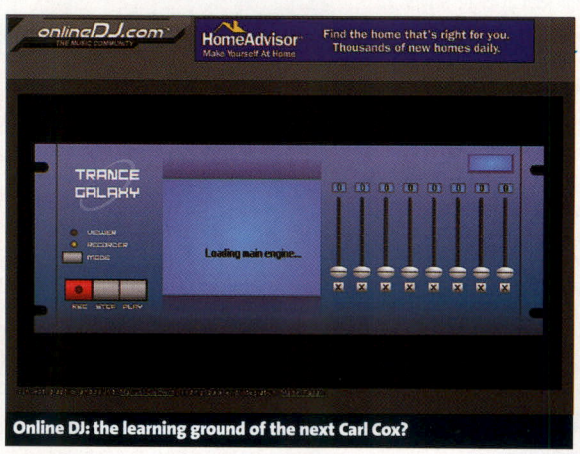
@ If you have to bookmark one...

ONLINE DJ

www.onlinedj.com ★★★★★

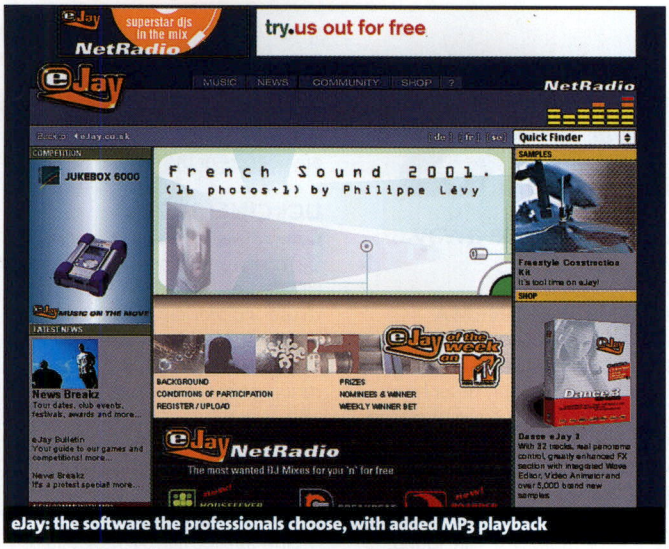
Not content to be one of the best resources and news services for DJs, Online DJ has some of the most fun and easiest to use mixing tools on the net. Where most mix sites give only the bare minimum of choice when it comes to different dance genres, here the user can choose between trance, house, jungle, hip hop and drum'n'bass. Once the decision has been made it's straight over to the mixing station – different for each style – where the beat-making can begin. The graphics may be simple but they're easily and quickly manipulated and in no time tracks are being made that wouldn't sound out of place at any of the superclubs. They may not hold much appeal for the more seasoned DJ, but if you're just dipping your toes in the ocean of dance, then this is perfect.

One other neat addition that's only been up a couple of months is the Music Glossary, in which you can discover exactly what an Aperiodic Waveform is, or find out when you should be adding Intermodular Distortion to your tracks. And should you get bitten by the DJ bug, then the Tutorial section has a few software guides to help you along, while the huge number of discussion forums take in everything from the best equipment to buy to how to perform that all-important flick back elbow twist scratch.



Online DJ: the learning ground of the next Carl Cox?

WORDS: SAM UPTON; PICTURES: ANGELA LUBRANO/LIVE PHOTOGRAPHY



eJay: the software the professionals choose, with added MP3 playback

reinventing herself as a dance diva in her latest incarnation – and no self-respecting DJ should pass on the opportunity to tweak a few of her knobs and buttons.

SS7X7

www.ss7x7.com ★★★

On first glance this may not look like the most inviting site, with its robo-speak title and A-Level project title page. But the home page for the Sound System 7x7 software package contains some hidden delights. Choose between the sexy-sounding Db-7x7 or the SS7x7 then download the mixing board before choosing from the site's own songs and you can mix until the cows come home (or the Noise Abatement Society arrives, whichever comes sooner). When solo study gets a little lonely, move onto their Livejam 797 which allows you to mix records with friends and share the block rockin' beats. A neat, effective online package, even if they do describe their product as 'Easy listening for the hyperactive'.

DJ SOURCE

www.djsource.co.uk ★★★

A nicely styled site, DJ Source is the perfect place to go once you trade up to a pair of Technics, with an exhaustive array of lessons explaining every possible DJ technique as well as what equipment to buy. Then, whether you mix online or off, you can upload your own finished product to be discussed in the forum (if you want to throw yourself at the mercy of your peers, that is) or make suggestions for the ideal dance record.

EJAY

www.ejay.com ★★★★

Constantly updated and improved with new samples and features, eJay is still one of the best pieces of DJ software you can buy, and its site is equally impressive. While the news section, online radio stations, interviews and competitions are all worthy of mention, the Shockwave edition of the mixing tool is more than a good introduction to the full version. It may not have all the features of the proper software but it'll amuse even the most demanding of amateur spinners. And should you tire of that, then you can also play back your own MP3s, download their stylish FreePlayer or listen to other people's efforts and find out what you're doing right/wrong.

It allows you to mix favourite records with friends

CHEMICAL BROTHERS SOUND LAB

www.musicfanclubs.org/chemical/chem.htm ★★★★

Band fan sites aren't usually renowned for their innovation and forward-thinking. But this Chemical Brothers shrine extends beyond the usual news and reviews by including a feature whereby big beat aficionados can mix together famous Chemical Brothers tracks online. There's no waiting around for software to download or complicated mixing desks to master – just samples of the duo's famous songs and more samples with which to splice them together. The quality may not quite be up to the level of a headline festival slot, but at least you get all the music without the mud and the warm beers thrown in.

@CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

BAND SITES

UBL.com
www.ubl.com
Go here first for the huge search engine.

Bigmouth
www.bigmouth.co.uk
UK-specific site with tons of links.

Wall of Sound
wallofsound.go.com
Links and features from the US.

NEWS AND REVIEWS

RollingStone.com
www.rollingstone.com
The US publication features extra online content.

NME.com
www.nme.com
NME's online version has a reputation for breaking news.

Spin
www.spin.com
Online version of the edgy US music mag.

GIGS AND TOURS

Aloud.com
www.aloud.com
Brilliant search engine for gigs.

firstcalltickets.com
www.firstcalltickets.com
Tickets for everything from gigs to flower shows!

SceneOne
www.sceneone.co.uk
Easy-to-use guide.

Way Ahead
www.wayahead.com
Tickets at a great price.

BUYING CDS

secondsounds.com
www.secondsounds.com
Used CDs, but the prices are unbeatable.

Audiostreet
www.audiostreet.co.uk
With free postage!

Play247
www.play247.com
Cheap chart CDs.

recordstore.co.uk
www.recordstore.co.uk
'*The* home of dance music retail on the Net'.

MP3s

CMJ
www.cmj.com/mp3
MP3 portal, with newsy bits.

MP3.com
www.mp3.com
Heaps of downloads.

POST YOUR BAND'S MP3s

peoplesound.com
www.peoplesound.com
A popular unsigned band portal.

Clickmusic
www.clickmusic.co.uk
Excellent MP3 portal.

get-signed.co.uk
www.get-signed.co.uk
Share ideas and pick up tips.

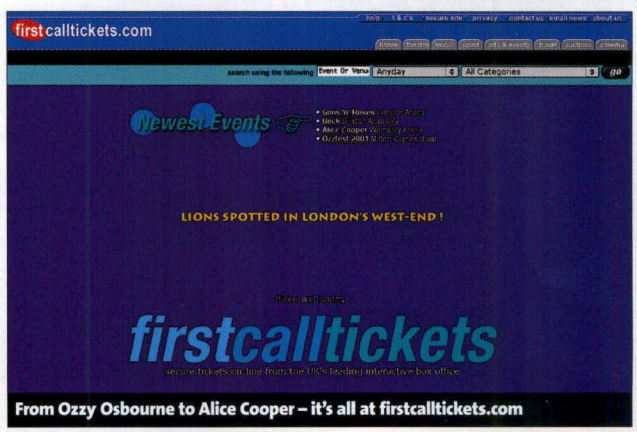
NEWSGROUP

rec.music.info
Chat about all music here.

JOIN A MAILING LIST

Join a discussion group focussing on electronic and world music by sending an email marked 'info globe-l' to ***listproc@nevada.edu***.

NME.com: a reputation for breaking news



From Ozzy Osbourne to Alice Cooper – it's all at firstcalltickets.com

NEED MORE? Latest music sites What's New p16
Useful music addresses The Directory p86

FOCUS:// Cinema listings guides

Click for the flicks

Want local cinema listings in a flash? You're only a prod of the mouse away...

Cut those queues by booking online

CINEWORLD – MULTIPLEX CINEMA

www.cineworld.co.uk ★★★★

If you've never travelled out of town, you've probably never heard of Cineworld. But there's still reason to praise this easily navigated site, which gives listings for its 20 multiplexes dotted around the country. The home page lists the areas where the multiplexes are found; click on one of them to find out what's playing, prices and a map. All films have a knowledgeable review attached to them, as well as a link to the official site. There's also a section devoted to kids' entertainment. Equally impressive is the Bollywood zone, which is filled with articles and actor profiles. And as if all these extras weren't enough, the fine folk at Cineworld have included a multimedia section that is chock full of wallpapers and screensavers.

TELETEXT – CINEMA

www.teletext.co.uk/bigscreen

★★★★

Teletext's site provides reams of information for the film lover, comprising interviews, gossip, competitions, trailers and features. The site's writers know their stuff, too: reviews are discerning and give the reader a feel of what's going on. The capsules for recent releases, complete with star ratings, certificate, running time, trailers and synopses, are also damn impressive.

Our only niggle is with the cinema finder: a series of scroll bars means wasted time if you're planning to see a film further from home and are not sure of the region.

UCI CINEMAS

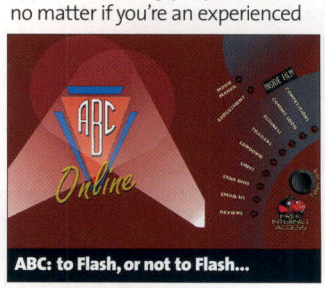
www.uci-cinemas.co.uk ★★★★

UCI operates 38 cinemas across the UK and Ireland, and its site is easy to use and provides the type of information you'd expect from a family cinema (ie certificate, running time and prices). There's also unexpected information, such as what's on sale in the kiosk as well as in the surrounding area, and how to reach the cinema by car or public transport (including a link to Multimap). You can even sign up to receive weekly emails from your local UCI telling you what's showing. The reviews and spotlights are informative; there are also competitions, links to other film sites, and information on how to get a job with UCI. You never know, it may lead you to Hollywood...

ABC CINEMAS

www.abccinemas.co.uk ★★★★

ABC has gone out of its way to appeal to as many people as it can, no matter if you're an experienced



ABC: to Flash, or not to Flash...

Net navigator or a novice. Choose from its Flash, normal and basic sites depending on what you're looking for. Maybe you just want to know what's playing at your local and aren't interested in virtual spotlights. In any event, what you'll get from all three versions of ABC's site is an easy-to-use film finder.

Current releases receive short synopses and a link to the official site. Older films, meanwhile, are treated to anything from a 30-word plot description to a full-length review. There are also hundreds of trailers to download. Last but by no means least, the cinema finder is a breeze to use: ABC operates around 30 cinemas across England and Scotland, all of which are presented online with details of ticket prices, how to get there and film times.

WARNER VILLAGE ONLINE

www.warnervillage.co.uk ★★★

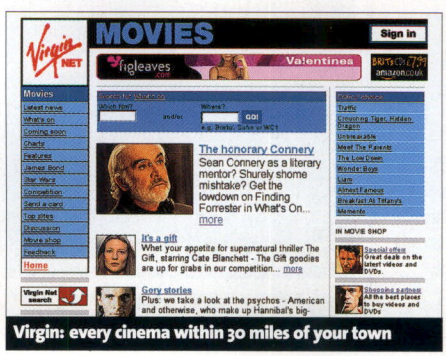
Warner Village's site is made for anyone whose use of the Net

@ If you have to bookmark one...

VIRGIN NET – MOVIES

www.virgin.net/movies ★★★★★

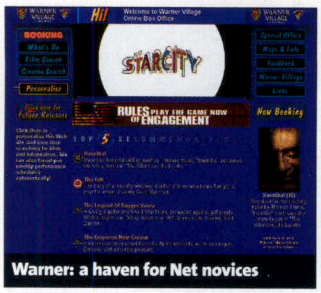
A group trip to the cinema can be hassle-free if all your mates are online, thanks to Virgin's movies site. An email option on all of the reviews and 'what's on' pages means you can forward your suggestions with a simple click, saving your fingers from that bulbous telephone keypad and saving pennies aplenty on your mobile. The cinema finder is quick, and brings up every movie house within about 30 miles of your chosen town or postcode. Clicking on your desired cinema will bring up their phone number, address, and travel directions. There's even a link to Multimap's site (***www.multimap.com***) in case you and your buddies decide to venture into new territory.



Virgin: every cinema within 30 miles of your town

But it's the extras that boost Virgin's site up to five stars. In addition to comprehensive film reviews which read like they've been written by someone who actually has an interest in cinema, users can check out the biggest box-office grossers, download trailers from the more recent releases and shop to their heart's content. The booty consists mostly of DVDs and videos, with the odd book thrown in here and there. Of course, Virgin's shopping section is huge, so you may find non-movie items to tempt you while you're there. Other perks include a message board where you can gab about trailers and the like, regular competitions offering envy-inducing tat, and an in-depth features area concentrating on whatever is hot on the circuit. If you're trying to tempt a special someone into a date, why not send over one of Virgin's e-cards along with your movie plans?

WORDS: JENNIFER KEARNS; PICTURES: KOBAL, PA



Warner: a haven for Net novices

doesn't expand beyond a few rudimentary forays, and whose interest in film writing doesn't extend beyond a few descriptive sentences. Yes, Warner has seemingly done without hiring writers and has, instead, focused on allowing you to buy cinema tickets online. Which, for us at *the net*, is obviously a good thing. Other perks include an option to personalise the site, thereby limiting information to your preferred cinema and film genre. You may also elect to have 'what's on?' emails sent to you. Just don't expect to find critical analyses or recommendations; Warner Village, it seems, takes an objective stance on new releases.

ANANOVA – GOING OUT

ananova.co.uk/goingout ★★★

Ananova's site receives no points for style, but the film finder is quick. The downside is that, as the title suggests, the site provides information on all types of leisure activities, from cinema to pantomime. What this means for the hurried surfer is a lot of scroll bars – forget to scroll and you could be going to see The Twits panto instead of *Hannibal*. There's also a lack of information about the cinemas: there's no mention of prices, and no maps. Perusing the review section could prove to be equally time-consuming. Films are sorted into 'earlier stories' and 'later stories', which means that you'll roughly have to judge when the film was released to find the review.

YELL.COM

www.yell.co.uk/yell/ff ★★★★

It might lack style, but it's direct. And, even better, Yell.com offers a wide range of 'extras' to help you turn a trip to the cinema into a full night out. Accessing cinema listings could prove tricky if you don't know what area your preferred town/city is in (we had to guess if *the net*'s local was 'London South' or 'South East') but, assuming you're staying local, results are quick. And even if you can't find your preferred flick, it defaults to listing what is on at your local. Once you've selected a cinema, take advantage of the option to find a restaurant, pub or club nearby – thirsty friends will love you forever. »

LINKS ;-) MOVIE DATABASES

Battle of the movie nerds

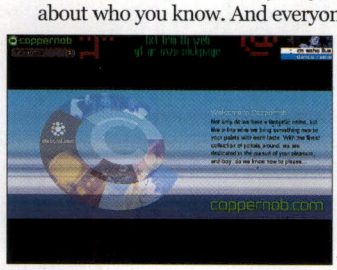
No-one likes change. And if people say they do, they're probably lying. People look for change when they've become so fed up with the 'old' that they're ready to burst. A favourite case in point is 'new' Coke. Everyone hated it. Why? Because it was 'new'. And everyone heralded the 'Classic' Coke which took its place because its name alone represented something which could never be tarnished. So what makes Coppernob.com (***www.coppernob.com***) think it can usurp The Internet Movie Database (***www.imdb.com***) as the film portal of choice?

Having launched by the time you read this, the latest addition to the Coppernob portal family (there are at least seven in all, including an online radio station and Coppernob Special Events) claims it will be 'the world's most comprehensive and easy to use database'. It will include every film produced from 1895, and will feature 24,000 reviews courtesy of Halliwell's, the undisputed bible of film directories. It will comprise cast credits, ratings, synopses, filmographies, awards and nominations, images and more. In short, it will have everything IMDb has; but is that enough to lure millions of users away from something that smacks of steadfastness?

What makes Coppernob think it can usurp IMDb?

Coppernob's CEO Gifi Fields stresses they're not looking to compete with the IMDb, and finds the suggestion that Coppernob Films could surpass the IMDb in terms of information complimentary. 'I love the IMDb,' Fields says, stressing that, if anything, Coppernob Films would strive to be a 'cleaner and clearer' directory. At the time of writing, the site was in the fine-tuning stage; although a sneak peek at what's in progress proved to us that Fields' ambition was being met. As with all of Coppernob's portals, Coppernob Film is all simple lines and click-easy choices. Type in a movie's title and all the information you could ask for is there; click on 'advanced search' and there's even more. Coppernob's decision to add the original source of the information is inspired – it's a verification of how hard they've worked to compile such a massive amount of data.

But work as hard as they may, sometimes it's all about who you know. And everyone knows the IMDb. Back in our December 2000 issue we rated it top in our 50 Greatest Web Sites of All Time poll. Our reasons? Because it encapsulates everything we love about the Internet, and because it's all about people celebrating a subject they love. And because the five million unique users who log onto the IMDb every month can't all be wrong.



So whether or not Coppernob Films will eventually outshine the IMDb remains to be seen. They certainly have competent people behind them (including Halliwell's editor John Walker, and the Guinness World record holder for the largest published film database, Alan Goble), as well as enough traffic flowing through their other portals to ensure a considerable audience. What they don't yet have is a name that dangles on the tongue the way 'Oxo' does for stock cubes, 'Johnson's' does for baby lotion, 'Heinz' does for baked beans, and 'IMDb' does for an online database of film facts.

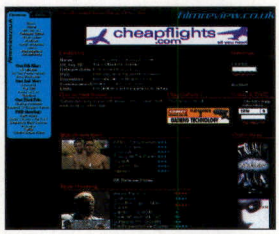
Coppernob: shaping up for gladiatorial battle

FOCUS:// Cinema listings guides <cont>

FILMREVIEW.CO.UK

www.filmreview.co.uk

★★★★



Filmreview.co.uk's cinema finder is powered by Scoot, so you can bet that your search will be hassle-free. Our hunt for a cinema in Bolton, for example, brought up about 15 cinemas, all within a 15-mile radius of our preferred area. Clicking on a particular cinema, we got the films that were playing, details about the venue, a map and information about restaurants and the like nearby. If you want more information about a film then you're in luck – an additional link to the IMDb gives you all the intricacies in a flash.

You can bet your search will be hassle-free

The rest of the site is a joy to use as well: film reviews are intelligently written, a Top 10 clues you in to what everyone else is watching, and a discussion forum puts you in touch with other film lovers. Great.

POPCORN.CO.UK

www.popcorn.co.uk

★★★★

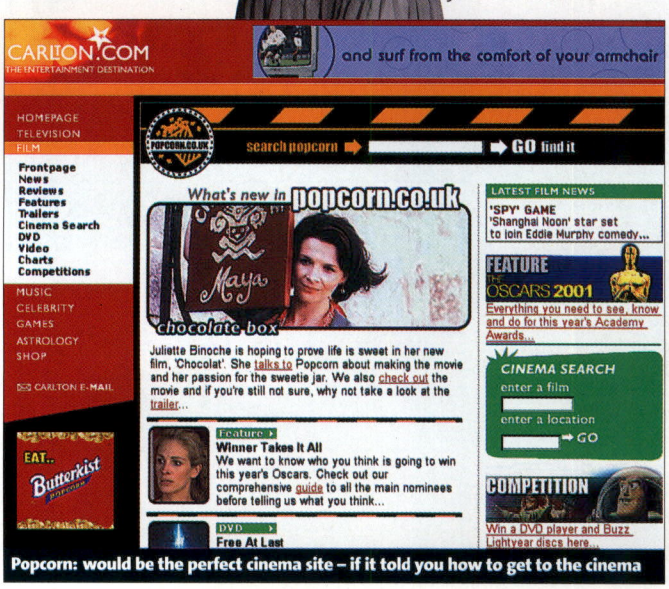
In addition to the usual cinema finder (type in your area and/or the name of the film you're looking for), Popcorn.co.uk's site offers film news, reviews, discerning critics' picks and competitions. Other extras include picture galleries, Top 10s and excellent features. The layout is undemanding while remaining bright and modern. In a way, it's the perfect cinema site, except that it doesn't offer that all-important 'how to get to' theatre information made available by, say, Virgin. In fact, when we asked for information on Milton Keynes' UCI, all we got was the address.

GUARDIAN UNLIMITED FILM

film.guardian.co.uk ★★★★

Guardian Unlimited's site is all that you'd expect: thorough, well written and spattered with images. In fact, it's only their less-than-perfect cinema finder that keeps this site from getting top accolades.

Worse than having to scroll down a series of areas such as with Yell.com's site, Unlimited Film merely asks for a postal code – near impossible for anyone travelling out of his or her hometown. Also, little information is provided about the cinemas. However, features such as the mood matcher make it worth a visit. It recommends films based on such things as whether you're feeling horny, are on a diet, or if your team's won.



Popcorn: would be the perfect cinema site – if it told you how to get to the cinema

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

ReelViews: James Berardinelli gives his take on new releases and film classics

MOVIE NEWS AND RELEASE DATES

Ain't It Cool News
aint-it-cool-news.com
For the inside track on what's new on screen.

Hollywood.com
www.hollywood.com
The latest gossip from the star-lined streets.

The Internet Movie Database (IMDb)
uk.imdb.com
The bible of online film – use the search engine or be lost.

Mr Showbiz: Movie Index
mrshowbiz.go.com/reviews/moviereviews/index.html
Find out what's playing and what's coming up at this competent site with a discerning edge.

MOVIE REVIEWS

Cinemachine
cinemachine.com
Retrieve film reviews from across the Web.

Movie Review Query Engine
www.mrqe.com
Flamboyantly-titled site featuring 19,000+ films.

ReelViews
movie-reviews.colossus.net
A searchable archive of film critic James Berardinelli's reviews.

The Trailer Park
www.movie-trailers.com
Trailers for all the newest films.

OFFICIAL FILM SITE RESOURCES

Fox Movies
www.foxmovies.com
Provides links to all 20th Century Fox movie releases.

Miramax Cafe
www.miramax.com
Links to all of Miramax's releases, plus general movie news.

Disney Movies: kid-friendly

Warner Bros Online
www.movies.warnerbros.com
Site featuring WB's new films and lost classics.

Disney Movies
www.disney.co.uk/DisneyMovies
All the kids' faves in one.

AMATEUR AND SHORT FILM WEB SITES

SightSound.com
www.sightsound.com
The place to see *The Quantum Project* – the first full-length, full-budgeted Net film.

in-movies
www.in-movies.com
Budding filmmakers may submit scripts here.

AtomFilms
www.atomfilms.com
Offers new filmmakers a chance to sell their wares.

TRY A NEWSGROUP

Misc. film
de.rec.film.misc
Have a natter about all aspects of cinema with other fans here.

MAILING LIST

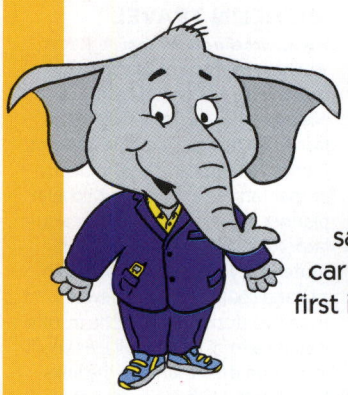
Join a film discussion group. Send an email marked 'info filmchat' to ***majordomo@lists.uoregon.edu***.

CHAT ROOM

www.film-philosophy.com
Read and discuss film articles here.

NEED MORE? **This month's movie sites** What's New p16
Useful media addresses The Directory p86

even cheaper car insurance



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www.cd-wow.co.uk

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SPECIAL EDITION CD INCLUDES TWENTY PAGE BOOKLET AND THE SINGLES
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CLINT EASTWOOD

CD IS ALSO ENHANCED WITH MULTIMEDIA SECTION FEATURING EXCLUSIVE SCREENSAVER AND HYPERLINK TO THE PREVIOUSLY LOCKED AND VERY PRIVATE NETHER REGIONS OF THE GORILLAZ WEBSITE.

WWW.GORILLAZ.COM Parlophone GORILLAZ © TM GORILLAZ Partnership 2000

FOCUS:// Route Planners

Get to the route of the problem

Whisking the family off to the Continent? Get a site to sort the journey for you

Foreign lands: can drive you round the bend

@ If you have to bookmark one...

SHELL ROUTE PLANNER

www.shellgeostar.com ★★★★★

Unless you've been there, you cannot imagine the terror of driving through Europe with your family on board. Anything, and we mean anything, can invoke the demonic wrath of your passengers, from taking a wrong turning to being unable to find a loo. Which is why, in a world of so-so planners, Shell's GeoStar comes as such a welcome relief. They know where the loos are. They've tracked down the service stations. And the amusement parks. Christ, if it comes to that, they've even pinpointed airports en route ('One more word and we'll all go home' need no longer be an empty threat).

In fact, GeoStar appears to cover just about every base. You get to input both the city and country of your departure/destination points (handy when there are two identically-named cities in two different countries, as we found with Bordeaux), and you can choose between the shortest/quickest routes and the short/long description. If you want to avoid toll roads, it will steer you round them. And you can choose between miles or kilometres for the guidance results. From there, you're handed a complete colour map and step-by-step route guidance, all on one printable page. But that's only the start – the results page also lets you search for the various attractions and facilities along the route, be it the aforementioned airports or even a winery.

GeoStar: you tell it where to start and finish, it does the rest

Problems? You only get a single choice of stopover, a bind should you be crossing from a port that offers more than one entry into your destination country.

Michelin: includes their famous Guides

MICHELIN TRAVEL

www.michelin-travel.com ★★★★

You have every right to expect much from a Michelin route planner – the company is, after all, famed for its tourist and restaurant guides. No surprise, then, to discover that (on the whole) the Michelin planner delivers. Take the toll calculator, for example – choose your route (yes, you get to choose both city and country, with no fewer than five stopovers), and the results include a total for the toll fees you'll incur. And then there are the links to in-depth Michelin guides at every major landmark. Oh, and don't forget you can change the route at given points – great if you've spotted somewhere to visit along the way and need precise directions. It's a shame, then, that Michelin couldn't make the site more UK-friendly; the results, for example, are in kilometres only. And throughout the site, there are examples of plain poor pigeon English; not a disaster, sure, but just irritating given the size and prominence of the company.

THE AA ROUTE PLANNER

www.theaa.com ★★

The Automobile Association, that bastion of driver-friendliness, has produced a route planner that's so flawed as to be virtually useless to the Euro-adventurer. Why? Try the fact that it refuses to cross the channel. A drop-down menu gives you the options of GB, Ireland or Continental Europe – and once you've made your selection, that's where you'll stay. Attempt to cheat it by inputting 'London', and it will default to a coastal town in France. Of course, in reality you can select 'London to Dover' and 'Calais to Bordeaux' – but why should you, when there are rivals that do all of the hard work for you? Sadly, it doesn't end there: there's no route map, and distances are in kilometres only, although you do get restaurants and service areas pointed out. Quite simply, the AA should be capable of better than this.

RAC ROUTE PLANNER

www.rac.co.uk ★★★

Strange that Britain's best-known motoring organisations are responsible for the most mediocre route planners. In fairness, the RAC's effort is infinitely more useable than the

AA's – thanks largely to the fact that it crosses the English Channel. However, from there on in the service lacks sparkle: there's no facility to choose countries on the planner's home page, let alone your street address, while the step-by-step guidance seems to lack even the basic service areas. That said, you do get a colour map that can be magnified, and the results are in miles. And it's quite possible that we visited the site at the worst possible time: a message on the results page apologised for the absence of the traffic data that's unique to the RAC. Put that back into the system, and you have a decent proposition.

MAPPY

www.mappy.co.uk

★★★★

In a hurry? You want Mappy, a site that serves the meat of the matter upfront – on the home page, you're prompted to input your departure and destination cities (no countries, mind), and whether you'd like your route to be 'Express', 'Without tolls' or 'Alternative' (yes, we wondered too...). You're then given the option of five stopovers, along with the size of your car and its fuel consumption. Hit 'confirm', and you get the distance from start to stop, the time it should take, the tolls you'll incur and the fuel cost in pounds sterling. Wonderful. Except that you don't get map guidance...not yet, anyway. After all that early effort in whisking you from A-M, Mappy then decides that N-Z should be broken into bite size chunks. So for our London to Bordeaux odyssey, we were given three links to three step-by-step sections. And these each had separate links to colour maps. Still, for all its eccentric logic, Mappy is well worth a visit.

Why do the motoring bodies have the worst planners?

GREEN FLAG

www.greenflag.co.uk ★★★★

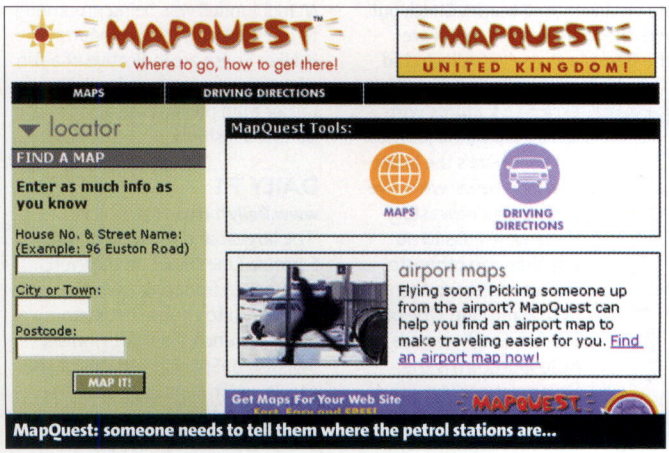
It may not the first name you cry when your vehicle splutters to a halt, but Green Flag has quietly outgunned its big name rivals when it comes to the business of getting you from Britain to Europe. While its route planner may lack the sophisticated touches of GeoStar, its no-nonsense approach ensures that you get the basics in a well-presented format. You just enter your departure/destination details into the home page, confirm countries and two stopovers, and away you go – a simple, step-by-step route guidance complete with colour map. The distance is given in miles, and petrol stations are pointed out along the way. No fuss, no frills, and all the better for it.

MAPQUEST

www.mapquest.co.uk

★★★

Already established in the US, MapQuest launched its UK service late last year. And as you'd expect from a sassy American outfit, it knows a thing or two about this mapping lark. After a single click from the simple home page, you're inputting departure/destination down to postcode and street level. You can choose whether or not you'd like a map, and if you'd like to avoid tolls, it will oblige. The results are easy to follow, the distances are in both miles and kilometres, and the map also comes with a mini rendition of your destination's town centre. Nice. Problem is, you're given no stopovers (we tried London to Bordeaux, and were lucky that it picked our intended Dover to Calais route), and there's no service station data. Which means that while MapQuest works well enough, they really could do a whole lot better.



MapQuest: someone needs to tell them where the petrol stations are...

WORDS: MARK PAYTON; PICTURES: CORBIS

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

Visit Deckchair UK (*www.deckchair.com*) for a comprehensive list of flights

TOP ONLINE FLIGHT DEALS

A2bTravel.com
www.a2btravel.com
'Britain's biggest online travel information and booking resource' has flights leaving from across the UK and Ireland.

MyOwnPrice.com
www.myownprice.com
This site asks how much you're prepared to pay and then tries to match it. Very useful.

Deckchair UK
www.deckchair.com
Comprehensive flight-finder.

Cheap Flights.com
www.cheapflights.com
Where thrifty surfers go for flights; they also do package holiday and late deals.

Lonely Planet: expert advice

www.fco.gov.uk/travel
Get info on countries before setting off.

The Travel News Organisation
www.travel-news.org
Independent news for travellers.

eTravel.org
www.etravel.org
Travel mag, with plenty of tips.

DESTINATION INFO

Virgin Net Travel – City Guides
www.virgin.net/travel/cityguides
Provides all the information you'll need for a short break.

Rough Guides
www.roughguides.com
From the publishers of the well-established guidebooks.

Lonely Planet Online
www.lonelyplanet.com
Let the travel experts guide you around your destination.

Beeb.com – BBC Holiday
www.holiday.beeb.com
Offers advice on everything you'll need for a perfect break.

DOS AND DON'TS

Tips 4 Trips
www.tips4trips.com
1,000 handy 'tips for trips'.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office – Travel Advice

ACCOMMODATION

Places To Stay
www.placestostay.com
This site will find you a suitable place to rest up.

CottageNet UK
www.cottage-net.ndirect.co.uk
Self-catering database for the UK and Ireland.

Smooth Hound Systems
www.smoothhound.co.uk
Cheap UK B&Bs and hotels.

Holidayleaders.com
www.holidayleaders.com
A global directory of villas to rent with plenty of choice.

NEWSGROUP

misc.transport.road
Vent your road rage over the Net.

CHAT ROOM

Find someone to travel with at ***www.passportwilltravel.com***.

NEED MORE? **Useful travel addresses** The Directory p86

FOCUS:// Formula 1

'Watch for the lights... go, go, go'

The world of F1 can change in a second – make sure you're up to speed online

@ If you have to bookmark one...

AUTOSPORT

www.autosport.com ★★★★★

Driven (geddit?) by the magazine of the same name, Autosport.com is a fine example of how to adapt a field-leading magazine to the new medium. It utilises Internet interactivity to send daily email newsletters to those who want their news up to the minute and hosts an online fantasy grand prix game for those who want to have their own vested interests. And if that's not enough to whet your appetite, tune in for the fortnightly Web radio show which runs throughout the season.

But it's not just whistles and bells. It would be a foolish magazine which ignored its wordy heritage to rush headlong into Net-only features. Autosport.com (which covers more than just F1 – there's also CART, rally, NASCAR, Formula 3...) features all the impeccable race reporting which gets fans flocking to the newsagent's every week: lap-by-lap reports are on the site quicker than Jacques Villeneuve and you can get all the background info on drivers and teams. Check out the circuits to see where the frail pieces of metal are most likely to fly off the track. Or, if you're feeling a tad more reflective, read the exclusive features written by top-name journos.

Then there's the latest breaking news: when we clicked on a news story there were links to no less than 100 other stories ranged down the right-hand side. One of them, tellingly, reveals Autosport.com is the UK's most popular sports site besides football and cricket. No wonder.

Autosport: links, gossip and all the latest racing news online

ITV-F1

www.itv-f1.com ★★★★★

There's no doubt that when it comes to attracting site visitors, being pushed by a high-profile TV programme does you no harm whatsoever. The official ITV site gets the benefit of constant exposure to every armchair GP fan in the UK, and when those fans turn from small screen to computer screen they're not going to be disappointed. The extensive site (revealed two months ago in *the net* to be one of Clive James's favourites, fact fans) is jam-packed with features, articles, pictures and downloads. Fans of the female form will love the 'pit babes' section (it's not all nuts and bolts, you know), while the more serious aficionado will avidly follow Australian Mark Webber's season diary as he test-drives for Benetton. Telly fans will also enjoy columns from the likes of Murray Walker. This may be the season that ITV-F1 mounts a serious challenge to Autosport for the top spot.

ITV-F1: choice of the thinking Aussie

F1I.COM

www.F1i.com ★★★★

Slightly strange URL – you get the impression they're tiptoeing as close to the trademark as F1 top-bod Bernie Ecclestone will allow – but this is a fun site for a quick pit-stop. On the day we visited, the two top stories demonstrated this: one wondered whether David Coulthard's off-track infelicities had cost him his relationship with his American supermodel fiancée Heidi Wichlinski, while the other suggested ITV's new commentary signing Mark Blundell was being groomed to replace the legendary Murray Walker. These are indicative of a fun site which seems to enjoy itself rather than present the news in a po-faced fashion.

DAILY F1

www.Dailyf1.com ★★★★★

'The largest and most up to date Formula One server on the Web,' trumpets a front page, which allows you to choose between English, French, German, Finnish, Swedish or Spanish versions of the site. Based in Hamburg, Daily F1 sweeps the Net for stories and compiles as much information as

WORDS: GARY PARKINSON ; PICTURES: LAT, EMPICS

possible into one place – making it a great read for the F1 fan in a hurry. The high volume of stories doesn't get lost in a commendably simple, uncluttered design, although the type size could do with being nudged up a bit. An excellent one-stop shop for the news-hungry fan.

ATLAS F1

www.atlasF1.com ★★★★

With a fancy masthead reminiscent of *The Times* and its description of itself as 'The Journal of Formula One', it's clear that Atlas F1 isn't short on self-belief. It's one of the longest-established F1 news sites and isn't designed in a light-hearted vein, but there is more than enough room in the world for a serious outlook on the sport. The news comes thick and fast on Atlas, thanks to the site's association with renowned newsgatherers Reuters, and this is a good place to come for the latest news – which, thanks to Reuters, is often exclusive. Not that it's a mere newsfeed: in-depth features are updated on a weekly basis, while the 'Daily Grapevine' rumours section keeps you up to date with the unconfirmed tittle-tattle of the track.

INSIDE F1

www.insideF1.com ★★★★

Calling all techies! Inside F1 has no room for pin-up drivers and glossy photoshoots. Launched at the US GP last year, InsideF1 likes to dwell on the technical and political issues in the sport. Indeed, it sells a monthly newsletter titled *The Business of F1*. As a result there's not a lot of breaking news in a 'Coulthard qualifies in pole' way; in its place the visitor gets plentiful access to specialised technical info. It's perfect for a certain sort of anorak, then, with bags of information written by a host of well-known journalists and some pretty good features. Visually, it's not the most stimulating – in fact, you could compare it to a Haynes car manual. Funnily enough, on the day we visited the site the main picture was a cutaway technical drawing...

CRASH.NET

www.crash.net ★★★★

Like Autosport.com, Crash.net covers more than just F1. Indeed, it goes even further by covering two-wheeled speedsters in the form of World Superbikes and bike GPs. However, it could pick up a few structural tips from our award winner: the homepage lumps all topics together and, as a result, the F1-only aficionado has to pick through the wash of stories which tend to get somewhat lost in the mix. The eagle-eyed can scour the »

LINKS ;-) FOOTBALL ONLINE

Dot coms face spot kick

Monitoring the world of football dot coms over the past couple of years has been every bit as eventful as being a Manchester City supporter – not to mention a lot more amusing at times.

No matter how hard the Web's giants try to crack that difficult football market, it seems they can never quite get it right. It might be Britain's most popular past-time, and one of the most lucrative leisure industries going, but most soccer sites are still left floundering – in terms of both traffic and quality – by their competitors in the world of music and lifestyle.

Football 365: pick of the bunch

One of the main problems with putting football online is that most people are interested solely in their own team, and will make that their first port of call. Creating a more general site with news and stats is a thankless task: though that hasn't put off dozens of outfits.

The onset of Euro 2000 coincided neatly with the dot com explosion, and led to huge numbers of football sites springing up. Many were virtually identical, others were doomed to failure: at the end of an eventful season, we're left with the cream of the crop.

While the crash-and-burn rate is lower among football sites than other industries, there are several looking distinctly unwell – and they'll be a dreading an action-less summer. Soccernet (***www.soccernet.com***) was once the golden child of the market, but since its purchase by US media giant ESPN there seems to be less to read on each visit: News International, meanwhile, has simply given up on its *Sun*-backed Football FC portal, and The Guardian's ***www.football unlimited.com*** fails to match up to its rivals for depth of coverage. Footballnews (***www.footballnews.co.uk***) has slipped into mediocrity after promising greatness.

The expected shake-out will leave us with a handful of essential bookmarks – and the pick of them has to be Football 365 (***www.football365.com***), which mixes news and facts with fun, opinion and interaction.

Lagging not far behind is the consistently brilliant ***www.teamtalk.com***, which delivers exclusive news and updates on almost every English and Scottish club. Sky Sports has poured money into ***www.sky sports.com*** football coverage, and has built a reputation for speedy news and scores.

We're now left with the cream of the crop of football sites

Several newcomers have also fared impressively. OneFootball (***www.onefootball.com***) is outstanding for pan-European coverage, but it remains to be seen whether Bulgarian League headlines will really pull in the punters. Soccer Association (***www.soccerassociation.com***) is unrivalled for stats, while FourFourTwo (***www.fourfourtwo.com***) gives the kind of fan-oriented features and opinions When Saturday Comes' site never delivered. Add to the mix the Rivals Network at ***www.rivals.net***, which has mini-sites for every major club, and your average supporter is spoiled for choice.

And that's the beauty of dot coms: build them up with your visits, then switch somewhere else and watch them fall. It's an instant seal of approval – and you can bet more football sites will be getting the thumbs down from fans in the coming months...

Trickiest opposition of the day: the post-match media scrum

GRAPHICS
DVD
SOUND
SPEAKERS
CD-RW
Wouldn't it be cool to carry around your entire music collection?
Sorted.
Live the experience
CREATIVE
D.A.P JUKEBOX
EAX
DIGITAL AUDIO PLAYER
D.A.P JUKEBOX
All Your Music. Wherever You Go.
The Creative D.A.P Jukebox stores 4 days of hi-fi quality music using MP3 and other future formats. You can enjoy listening to 150 albums, that's 1500 tracks of EAX enhanced audio, wherever you go. Find out more about our latest Personal Digital Entertainment products at WWW.CREATIVEJUKEBOX.COM
CREATIVE
PERSONAL DIGITAL ENTERTAINMENT
Starts Here.
All Your Music. Wherever You Go.

FOCUS:// Formula 1 <cont>

pages for the little lime-green 'F1' box which denotes our chosen subject, but a little more structure wouldn't go amiss. It's a pity really, because Crash.net is a very attractively designed site, beautifully laid out and informative. Links at the bottom of each story allow you to discuss the topic in a forum, but the most urgent discussion – if Crash.net wants to be a five-star site – should be how to structure the site!

F1: a bit like the M25, really

F1-LIVE.COM

www.f1-live.com

★★★

As the name would suggest, F1-Live's main selling point is the provision of live timings from grands prix as they happen – a useful backup for those numerous F1 fans who like to keep abreast of the statistics. It'd be interesting to know what Mr Ecclestone thinks about that, but for now fans can enjoy split-second updates. That's F1-Live's strongest card by some distance, as the news, while extensive, isn't particularly investigative or scintillatingly written. That said, there's a multimedia section which lets you send chums Webcards of their favourite motor, dozens of pictures of the top teams and a thriving forum section.

The ticker counts the seconds to the next GP

FORMULA 1.COM

www.formula1.com ★★★

How's about that for a URL? Too good, according to Bernie Ecclestone, who's been locked in legal battles with the site over use of the Formula 1 name. No wonder, as those (and there are many) who opportunistically put in the most obvious URL for any given subject will come straight here. Styles itself as the 'definitive Formula 1 site' but at times it can seem a touch self-righteous. There's a decent spread of news on here, and the visitor is pointed to related stories on similar topics – a useful investigative tool. Design is minimal, with red and yellow strips around the stories and very few pictures, but points must be awarded for the audio and video content and the numerous photos in the pictures section.

PLANET F1

www.planetF1.com

★★★

Yet another part of the 365 sports network, but this is far from the jewel in Danny Kelly's crown. It seems to pride quantity far more than quality: its launch promotion campaign was based on publishing at least 10 new F1 stories every day, but this can lead to somewhat forced pieces if the news isn't there (particularly off-season). At least you're always assured of something to read, though, and Planet F1 also boasts a cartoonist to brighten up the pages. Not that the site needs brightening, eye-boggglingly full as the front page is. As with all 365 products there's a good level of interactivity: various newsletters keep thirsty punters sated and a screensaver section. But the ticker counting down the seconds to the next Grand Prix? We could live without that.

Crash.Net: fittingly, it's a bit of a mess sometimes

@CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

A traditional bookie with a modern slant: *www.victorchandler.com*

LATEST NEWS AND SCORES

ESPN.com
espn.go.com
Scores for all sports, with a distinctly American bias.

Sky Sports
www.skysports.com
Forget begrudging the TV subscription fee – this is hot sports news from Sky that comes free of charge.

Soccernet
www.soccernet.com
Score flashes from all UK games (part of the ESPN network).

Sporting Life
www.sporting-life.com
News, scores and betting advice on everything from football to the NFL.

TOP FOOTBALL SITES

Football365.com
www.football365.com
Humour, news and plenty of features.

FourFourTwo
www.fourfourtwo.com
The online home of Britain's best football magazine.

Teamtalk
www.teamtalk.com
Independent club news service.

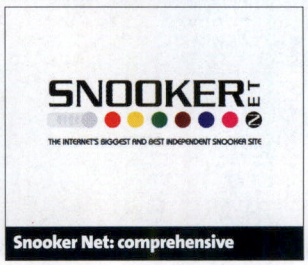
soccer-links.com
www.soccer-links.com
Links for world sites.

ONLINE BETTING SITES

Blue Square
www.bluesq.com
Best-known online bookie.

Sporting Index
www.sportingindex.com
The biggest spread-betting site.

Victor Chandler
www.victorchandler.com
User-friendly site from the traditional bookie.



Snooker Net: comprehensive

FOLLOW EVENTS LIVE

PlanetFootball.com
www.planetfootball.com
Hub site for English football clubs' audio broadcasts.

Sport On Air
www.sportonair.com
Host of bang up-to-date streamed broadcasts, covering news from football to cricket.

talkSPORT
www.talksport.net
Listen to the radio station's sports coverage as it happens.

SITES FOR INDIVIDUAL SPORTS

planet-rugby.com
www.planet-rugby.com
Where the oval ball rules – hot news from around the globe.

Snooker Net
www.snookernet.com
'The Internet's Biggest and Best Independent Snooker Site'.

CricInfo
www-uk.cricket.org
The ultimate ball-on-willow site; news and statistics galore.

FIND A NEWSGROUP

rec.autos.sport.f1
Talk motors with other fans here.

FIND A MAILING LIST

Meet other racing fanatics. Send an email marked 'info AUTORACE' to ***listserv@vtvm1.cc.vt.edu***.

NEED MORE? Useful sports addresses The Directory p86

FOCUS:// Silver Surfers

Silver surfers: leisurely

Age before beauty...

Senior surfers are talking over the Net – and here's the best of the sites dedicated to the older Web user

FIFTH MOON

www.fifthmoon.com ★★★

As far as the design goes, this site stands head and shoulders above the competition, boasting a sleek colour scheme and eye-catching layout. At first glance it evokes comparison with the sort of glossy magazines that are all style and no content, and unfortunately the analogy holds true in a number of respects – not least in regard to the amount of space given over to advertising. Fifth Moon wants to become an important voice for the over-50s, and certainly it has the necessary style and sophistication to propel it to the forefront of public attention. The actual advice, as it stands, is commendable: consumer news, product reviews and advice on investments and shopping sit comfortably alongside campaigns to tackle age discrimination. Fewer ads, however, and more to read would be a real help...

VAVO

www.vavo.com ★★★★

Show me a Silver Surfer, and I'll show you a silver dollar: that seems to be the name of the game here. However, the commercial imperatives of this sprawling portal site are not nearly as overbearing as Fifth Moon, because Vavo makes no bones about its intent to capitalise on the buying power of its users. As with any good portal site, neither does it skimp on the links, with a solid selection of categories to choose from, each headed up by a section leader. That's a nice personal touch, and with up to date news and a commendable range of articles to bolster the content, you can't really find significant fault with this very professional service. Send your granny there now.

WRITE A SENIOR CITIZEN

www.writeseniors.com ★★★★

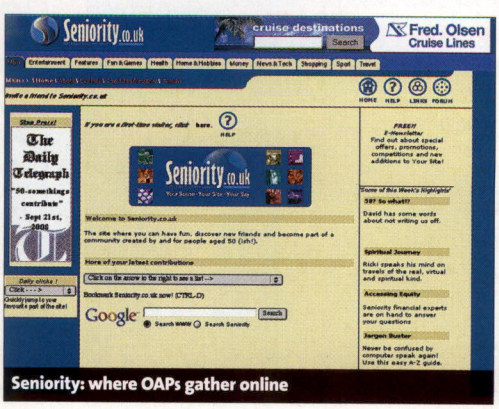
This site neatly espouses the theory that the best ideas are often the simplest. It's home to over a thousand penpal hopefuls, all of them keen to hear from like-minded individuals. You must be over 55 to register, but there's no upper age limit. Once you've signed up, you're free to browse the profiles of the other members and send them messages. Some of the profiles are very detailed, others are more sketchy, but there's a real sense of community here. Some of the messages are very touching, too.

@ If you have to bookmark one...

Seniority.co.uk

www.seniority.co.uk ★★★★★

Online communities are a great idea in principle. Get the infrastructure right and they can be almost self-sustaining, especially if you attract people who are willing to do more than dash off the occasional gripe to the chatboards. Seniority.co.uk seems to capture just that sort of lightning in a bottle, to such an extent that there is very little in the way of in-house editorial content. Instead the site is essentially a work in progress by its users, who have contributed everything from book reviews to a multi-part essay about the *Castaways* television series, written by somebody living in relatively close proximity to the island. The quality of the writing is obviously hostage to the talents (or lack thereof) of the contributors, but the very fact that people are willing to send in pictures of a family day out speaks volumes for the ability of the site to foster a community spirit. The obvious point to make is that these features often have little obvious connection with any age-related issues, but then since the editorial policy is essentially hands-off, this site doesn't really have an overwhelming ethos that might rub off on the users. As a look at the chat boards reveals, the conversation tends to gravitate predominantly to those areas concerned with fun and leisure, with little in the way of embittered focus on the downsides and tribulations of growing old.



Seniority: where OAPs gather online

WORDS: JOHN GOSLING; PICTURES: KOBAL

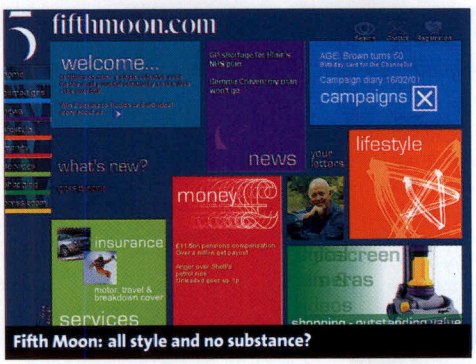
ister yourself as a penpal, but the free service will allow you to list your interests and even a photograph. Those seeking a penpal can search by a number of criteria, including date of birth or country of residence, so the chances of forging a real long-term friendship with a like-minded individual seem favourably high.

BBC HEALTH: HEALTH AT 50

www.bbc.co.uk/health/50plus

★★★★★

While there are plenty of sites that will help you spend your money, or offer a lighthearted look at the process of ageing, there is going to come a time when you need to cut through these distractions and get straight to the facts. This is the place to do it. There is an embarrassment of riches to found on this specialist health site for the over-50s, and of course the public service ethos of the BBC is your guarantee of quality, accuracy and plenty of expert opinion. Since this is just one small adjunct to an even larger set of health pages, you can also be sure that the sheer volume of traffic through the servers will keep the message boards humming.



Fifth Moon: all style and no substance?

SEE HOW THEY GROW

www.seehowtheygrow.com

★★★★

To some degree it is probably fair to say that for your average grandparent, dealing with children is like riding a bicycle. After all, you are never likely to forget the fundamentals. Baby talk and bottle-feeding are a snap and you laugh in the face of nappy rash, but as this site amply demonstrates, the older they get, the wider the gulf of understanding grows. Thus one can look with considerable sympathy upon the poor person who asks on the chat board, 'Who is this Britney Spears?' See How They Grow styles itself as 'A Grandparents Guide' and does an admirable job of doing just that, offering advice and insights that will not only help bridge the generation gap, but increase the joy to be had from the little monsters.

RESEARCH INTO AGEING

www.ageing.org ★★★★

No, this is not some crackpot search for the secret of eternal life, but rather the Web site of a very worthwhile British charity. Their aim is not necessarily to cure the incurable or give the old an immediate new lease of life, but rather to address a broad remit of problems, everything in fact from heart disease to the psychological and sociological concerns of the elderly. For instance, one researcher is looking at the way older people can better adjust to new technology. You might say the site has a slight hospital smell about it, but the pristine design and content add up to a detailed and illuminating insight.

FIFTYON

www.fiftyon.co.uk ★★★

It is a sad fact that the older you get, the harder it is to find gainful employment. By the time you hit your fifties, you are considered not so much over the hill, as well on your way to rolling to the bottom. This newly launched site has the laudable aim of getting British business to recognise the potential of older workers, by offering senior job seekers the advice and encouragement to make employers sit up and take notice. Technically, there are some impressive features to this site, with a great deal of interactivity on offer, but it's early days yet and, until the full raft of services come on stream, it's perhaps a great site in the making.

I DON'T FEEL 50

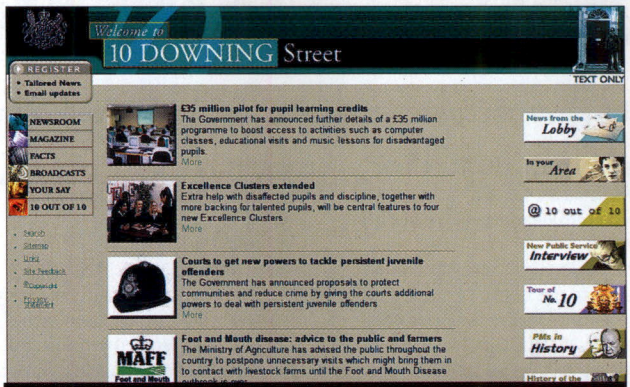
www.idf50.co.uk ★★★★

He certainly doesn't. Graham Andrews has a rather playful attitude to life and a site to match, and while this is not the prettiest piece of design to ever grace the Web, the passion for his work and quality of the content more than compensates for the slightly amateur design. Full of fun and irreverence that makes it such a unique source of news and views in a sea of sometimes painfully uninspiring sites.

I Don't Feel 50: irreverent

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials



Go behind the scenes at Downing Street's site, at *www.number-10.gov.uk*

GOVERNMENT

10 Downing Street
www.number-10.gov.uk
Features the latest news and facts, and an opportunity to join a discussion forum.

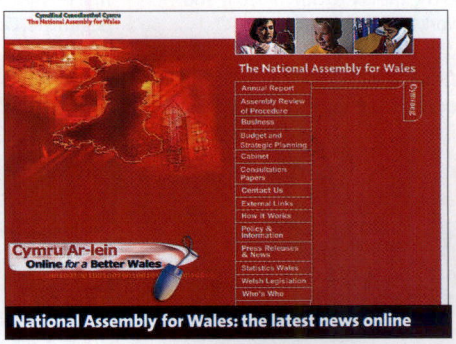
Department of Health Website
www.doh.gov.uk
Read up on the Dept's policies, and health-related reports.

Scottish Parliament
www.thebabyregistry.co.uk
Up-to-the-minute news bulletins, and a chance to share your views .

National Assembly for Wales
www.wales.gov.uk
Features news, press releases, the latest policies, and links to other Welsh offices.

Long Term Care for the Elderly
www.open.gov.uk/royal-commission-elderly/index.htm
Proof that your government cares.

Better Government for Older People
www.bettergovernmentforolderpeople.gov.uk
Winner of the Longest Domain Name In Cyberspace award.



National Assembly for Wales: the latest news online

ORGANISATIONS FOR THE ELDERLY

Age Concern Homepage
www.ace.org.uk
The charity's home on the Web.

Help the Aged
www.helptheaged.org.uk
Provides practical help.

CAADE
www.caade.net
Fights discrimination at work.

National U3A UK
www.u3a.org.uk
Adult learning from the University Of The Third Age.

RELIGION

Church Net UK
www.churchnet.org.uk
Database for Christian affairs.

The Buddhist Society UK
www.buddsoc.org.uk
Traditions, books and courses.

Jewish.net
www.jewish.net
'The number one European destination for all things Jewish'.

Islam Direct
www.islamdirect.com
News, teachings and links.

ACTIVITIES FOR THE ELDERLY

Over the Hill Gang Int'l
www.skiersover50.com
Sports club for older people.

Saga Holidays
www.sagaholidays.com
Holidays for the elderly.

TRY A NEWSGROUP

soc.senior.issues
Conversation from online elders.

VISIT A CHAT ROOM

www.babyboomerbistro.org.uk
Dedicated chat – and more – for the elderly.

NEED MORE? **Hundreds of addresses** The Directory p86

FOCUS:// Learning languages

Speaking in tongues

The days of *écoutez et répétez* are finally over – now, the only way to learn is online...

AN INTRODUCTION TO MODERN GREEK

www.catcode.com/greek/index.htm ★★★★★

The hackneyed expression 'It's all Greek to me' doesn't hold as much water once you've had a look at this site. It's the Greek alphabet that's to blame for the phrase, but do as the site suggests – forget everything you know about the English alphabet – and you'll be halfway there. In an effort to speed up your learning, no English spellings of the Greek words are given, forcing you to remember the sounds of the Greek letters. Almost all the new letters and words are accompanied by sound files to demonstrate correct pronunciation, however. And, because so much new information can be wearing, the site enlivens the process by making it rewarding: new letters are introduced gradually to form more useful phrases such as 'How are you?'. Users will be grateful for the jargon-free explanations of grammatical terms. Although the site calls itself an 'introduction' to Greek, it'll take time to absorb it all, so the facility to download it and work offline is ideal.

@ If you have to bookmark one...

TRAVLANG

www.travlang.com ★★★★★

'Aapkaa snanghar kahan hai?' For your sanitary comfort and security, anyone planning a cheap stay in India should take care to memorise this essential phrase. You'll find plenty of other useful words and expressions on Travlang, an ideal first stop if you need to learn just enough of another tongue to get by. The foreign languages section of this self-dubbed 'travel and language supersite' offers online phrasebooks for an impressive range of 74 global languages, enthusiastically including several which are either dying out or dead (surely even the Pope wouldn't have to order a meal in Latin?). All the main subject areas are covered – from travel, directions and telling the time to shopping and dining – so, although there's no grammatical guidance to show you how to create your own sentences, you'll find everything you'll need to manage. Like all the best language-learning resources on the Web, every foreign word on Travlang has a sound file attached so you can hear exactly how it should be pronounced. Words for languages with individual alphabets, like Greek, Arabic and Thai, have Roman spellings of the words as well as their own scripts, and the consistent, straightforward layout means it takes just a few clicks to find out how to order a taxi in Turkish or ascertain the price of eggs in Esperanto. Now wouldn't that be useful?

Travlang: provides essential phrases for the hurried traveller

LEARN SPANISH

www.studyspanish.com ★★★★★

You can pay a subscription fee to get the 'Premium Service' from this tidy site and benefit from extra exercises and audio CDs, but the free version has plenty to offer beginners. Don't be put off by the academic terms heading the grammar section; the explanations are perfectly readable. Once you've mastered Spanish pronunciation, you're ready to work your way through the comprehensive grammar and vocabulary units, the latter covering everything from plants to the universe. And if you can't find the word you're after, there's an online translator to help you out. Learn Spanish is simple to use and thorough, even if you only use the standard course.

'¿Cómo se pronuncia esta palabra?' See studyspanish.com

CYBERITALIAN

www.cyberitalian.com ★★★★

You have to pay to subscribe to the full Italian courses available here, but the free trial lessons will help you make basic conversation. Hone your pronunciation with the help of sound files, then read and listen to the adventures of the cheeky Pinocchio in a series of dialogues with other characters. Rather than bombard you with information before you can even make a sentence, each scene introduces a new grammatical idea which is explained in full. A glossary at the side of the page encourages you to translate and memorise vocabulary as you go, and dotted along the way are links to windows featuring 'Cultural Tidbits' suggested by Pinocchio's conversations.

FAST AND FRIENDLY FRENCH FOR FUN

library.thinkquest.org/12447 ★★★

Great for beginners and anyone whose French needs refreshing, this homely site provides a 'Guided Tour' through nine simple lessons. The animal pictures might be a little

WORDS: ALEX NEWBY, ROBERT JEFFERY; PICTURES: KOBAL COLLECTION; ILLUSTRATION: DAVID SEMPLE

babyish, but help make the site approachable, although the texts do this well enough themselves. A welcome relief from sites which expect their visitors to know all the grammatical rules, this one explains each one in layman's terms before introducing them in French. It's a pity that, apart from the alphabet and numbers, nowhere else are there sound files to help you with your pronunciation (the written descriptions should be taken with a pinch of salt). The short vocabulary lists are equally disappointing. For comprehensive vocabulary lists and sound files, visit The French Tutorial (***www.helio.org/education/french***), a more sophisticated French course better suited to experienced language students.

THE JAPANESE TUTOR

www.japanese-online.com

★★★★★

Japanese can be easy: simply follow lessons number 1-16 and you, too, can buy stamps from a Japanese post office! Each lesson uses the same simple format: a spoken dialogue you can listen to and read in Romanji (Japanese written in Roman letters), English and Kanji (Japanese script, which you have to

The Japanese Tutor: alluring promises

pay to download), followed by a glossary with sound files, a step-by-step explanation of grammatical ideas, and a few exercises to make sure you've taken it all on board. 'Culture Points' dotted throughout the lessons give a deeper insight into the cultural role of various words and phrases. For lessons in writing Japanese, visit The Japanese Tutor (***web.missouri.edu/~c563382***), which includes animated images showing the correct strokes for writing Japanese characters, as well as spoken Japanese lessons and sections on other areas of Japanese culture. Although much of the site is still being developed, its promises of alluring content make it a site to keep coming back to.

GERMAN FOR TRAVELLERS

www.germanfortravellers.com

★★★

Any travellers visiting the learning section of this site will need to »

LINKS ;-) DIALECT TRANSLATORS

Local slang for local people

Spare a thought, if you will, for foreigners. As if it's not enough that before visiting these shores they must gain a working knowledge of the most illogical language on Earth, on arrival they find a vast array of dialects so disparate they must feel they've visited a dozen different countries, not just the one.

Try using the Queen's English in Glasgow or the East End of London and you'll be struggling to understand much of the conversation, as regional slang leaves you baffled. Throw swearing into the bargain and it's a wonder anyone comes here.

Fortunately, there are a selection of sites aimed at understanding the vagaries of English – though not all of them will be entirely recognisable to the people who are supposed to use them.

MerseysideToday: speak Scouse

So popular is this dialect malarkey that there's now an entire site dedicated to translating 'ordinary' English into Geordie, Scouse, et al. Whoohoo (***www.whoohoo.co.uk***) is probably more fun for natives than visitors, as many of the replies are patently absurd, but it's spawned a whole range of other translators, including ***www.merseyguide.ndo.co.uk***.

Possibly the most widespread dialect sites are those devoted to Cockneyisms. Spurred, no doubt, by the trans-Atlantic appeal of *Lock, Stock...*, such sites convince tourists that residents of London's East End spend their days telling everyone how 'tooled up' they are on their 'manor'. See ***www.londonslang.com*** or ***www.bio.nrc.ca/cockney*** for particularly over-the-top examples. More sensible phrasebooks can be found at UK English for the Native American (***www.hps.com/~tpg/ukdict***), which explains the everyday anomalies between the two countries.

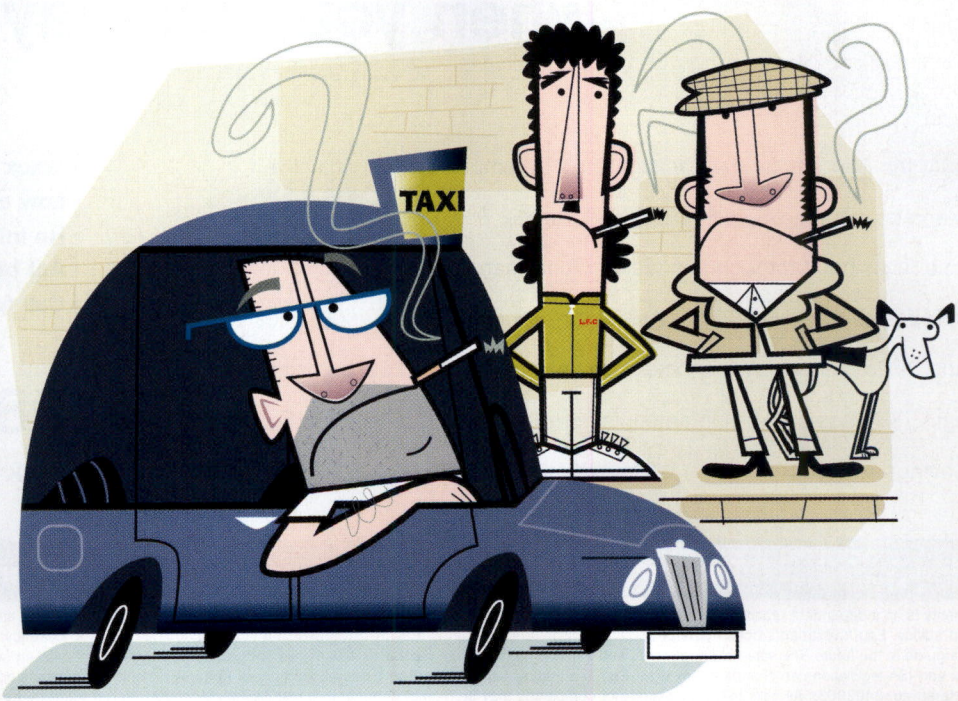
There are a selection of sites aimed at the vagaries of English

And then there are the specialist slang sites. The Rap Dictionary (***www.rapdict.org***) will appeal to anyone who harbours a desire to boast of being 'totally dope'. Street Drug Slang (***surreal.tripod.com/streetdrugslang.htm***), meanwhile, is a must-see for this summer's Ibiza trippers (African Woodbine, anyone?).

And just in case you thought slang was restricted to the British Isles, why not visit the Dictionary of Antarctic Slang at ***penguincentral.com/MCMslang.html***. Compiled by bored research workers, it offers such gems as 'bunny boots' ('resembling those worn by Mickey Mouse') and skua ('a dirty, plain nasty bird').

The Web has plenty of jargon of its own – which is why you'll look distinctly unhip if you don't keep a regular eye on Wired.com's Jargon Watch to keep up-to-date on 'clickthrough farmers' and 'metajackers'.

And if you'd rather forget all about the intricacies of the English language and get down to good old-fashioned swearing, *Viz's Profanisaurus* is now online, at ***www.viz.co.uk/profanisaurus/profanis.htm***. While we'd like to reproduce a few excerpts for your enjoyment, sadly the boundaries of good taste are far more prevalent in the printed world than they are online...



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FOCUS:// Languages <cont>

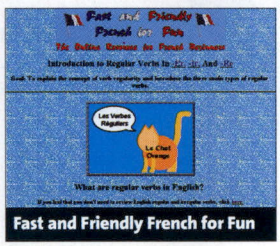
come with some basic grounding in German to make the most of it, as there is nothing here for absolute beginners. The main vocabulary areas, like travel, food, shopping and a selection of everyday situations feature several sub-categories accompanied by audio files for each word or phrase. And the grammar section includes everything from articles to cases and modal verbs. Smart design, simple navigation and clear explanations affirm the professional feel of this site, as do the exercises to test your knowledge.

TAALTHUIS DUTCH COURSE

www.taalthuis.com

★★★

With its awkward spelling and pronunciation, Dutch is notorious for being hard to learn; a fact which this site acknowledges with its amusing selection of confusing words in its 'Double Dutch' glossary. These free online lessons from Taalthuis make a commendable attempt to demystify the language, with vocabulary lists and audio files to help novices with their pronunciation, plus clear explanations of all aspects of Dutch grammar. If you're not familiar with the basics of the tongue, you may feel a bit confused by some of the terminology in the grammar section, which is probably best used in conjunction with the beginners' course. Here, four lessons of 10 parts each gradually introduce you to more vocabulary and grammar, though at times the aim of the lesson is unclear.



Forget all about the English alphabet

INTRODUCTION TO FINNISH

eunuch.ddg.com/LIS/InfoDesignF97/paivir/finnish/sitemap.html

★★★★

With its ridiculously long words full of consonants, Finnish always raises a smirk, but learning it doesn't seem so impossible when you look at this well thought-out site. Gain a little confidence by learning a few basic words and phrases, then start expanding your knowledge with the three lessons. Each presents a short dialogue accompanied by a glossary and links to areas of the site where you can find out how the grammar works. The 'Basics' section explains pronunciation with sound files, though some of the written descriptions seem a little suspect. Still, you can always work the pronunciation out for yourself by looking at the words and listening to the sound files.

THAI LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

www.seasite.niu.edu/thai ★★★★

Study the 'Quick Thai' section here and you should soon be able to make yourself understood. Be sure to pay attention to the sound files, though, as Thai words depend as much on pitch for their meaning as they do on vowels and consonants. More serious learners will need to download the Thai fonts, though they're not necessary for the alphabet pages, which use pictures to translate sample words for each written character. Beware of ambiguity: is it the word for a pot or a bowl? A youth or a dapper haircut? Southeast Asian languages are so different from Western ones that if you want to get past parrot-fashion Thai you'll need to pore carefully over the 'Language' area, which varies in clarity and content. Be prepared to exercise a little patience, both to cope with the complexities of Thai and a few challenging aspects to the site's navigation.

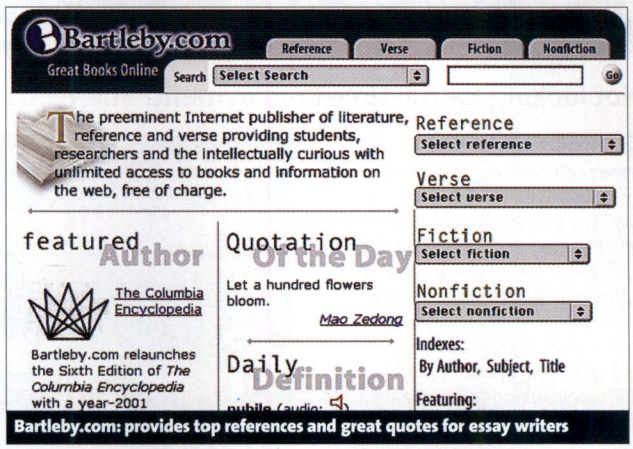
BABEL: ARABIC

i-cias.com/babel/arabic ★★★★

This site does not claim to be a full Arabic course. Instead, the lessons aim to give you enough experience of the language to help you decide whether to pursue it further, at the same time teaching you how to say street names and ask the price of a room for the night. Beginners can learn a variety of useful phrases by reading transliterations with translations and sound files to help with pronunciation. Once you've got the hang of that, the excellent handwriting section helps to demystify all those lines, dots and squiggles. Then you can practice your reading skills as you find out all about the life and loves of Issam, a young man from Alexandra who has loved Swedish women since he was a teenager and whose proud personal smoking record is 103 cigarettes in one day.

@CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials



Bartleby.com: provides top references and great quotes for essay writers

QUOTATIONS AND PROVERBS

Bartleby.com
www.bartleby.com
Spice up your essays with a quote.

Famous Quotations Network
www.famous-quotations.com
Search for quotations by country or author.

ENCYCLOPEDIAS

Webopedia
www.pcwebopedia.com
Specialises in IT topics.

Online Dictionaries, Glossaries and Encyclopedias
stommel.tamu.edu/~baum/hyperref.html
Large list of online resources.

FunkandWagnalls.com
www.funkandwagnalls.com
Selection of historical articles and a perspective on modern events.

EXAM RESOURCES

Topmarks Education
www.topmarks.co.uk
Help with hundreds of topics.

revisiontime.com
www.revisiontime.com
Provides helpful links on a variety of subjects.

Learn.co.uk
www.learn.co.uk
Useful tips for five- to 19-year-olds.

S-Cool!
www.s-cool.co.uk
Provides revision material for GCSE and A-level students.

Schoolnet
www.schoolsnet.com
Award-winning education site for students, parents and teachers.

DISTANCE LEARNING

The Open University
www-icdl.open.ac.uk
The Open University on the Net.

Tele-School Online
www.tele-school.org
Learn online and interact, too.

CONVERTERS AND SYMBOLS

MegaConverter 2
www.megaconverter.com/mega2
Convert from just about anything to anything else.

Symbols.com
www.symbols.com
Online list of graphic symbols.

PICK UP A USEFUL SKILL

Learnfree.com
www.learnfree.com
Features RealVideo tutorials.

S-Cool!: revision made interesting

LEARN AN INSTRUMENT

Piano World
www.pianoworld.com
Tickle those ivories like a pro.

Cyberfret.com
www.cyberfret.com
'Online college of guitar wisdom'. Tutorials and chords available here.

TRY A NEWSGROUP

sci.lang.translation
Still having trouble with translation? See if someone has the answer here.

JOIN A MAILING LIST

Join a language discussion list. Send an email marked 'info engl 560' to ***listproc@u.washington.edu***.

NEED MORE? Useful addresses for kids The Directory p86

FOCUS:// Part time jobs

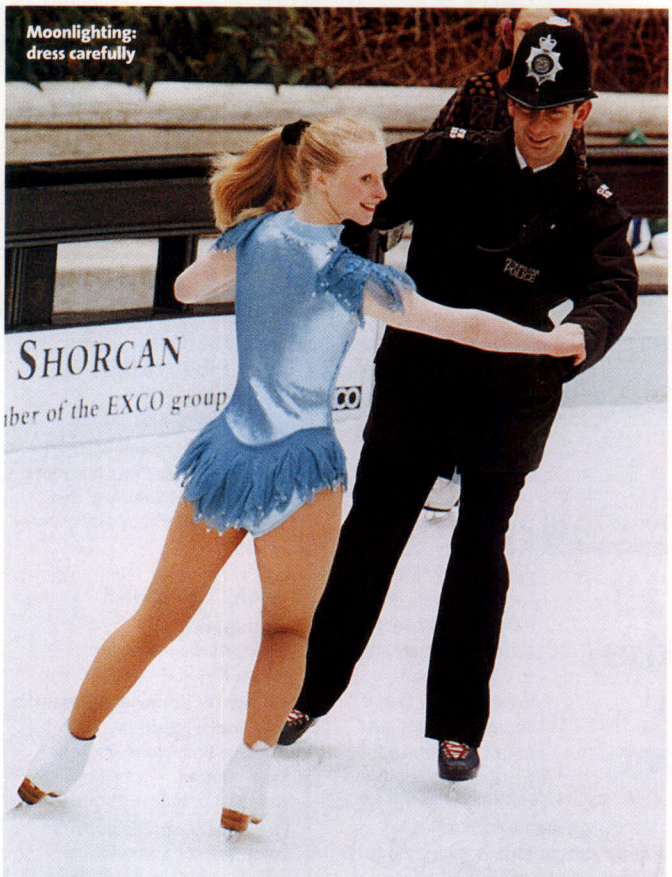
A bit on the side

Not looking for full-time employment? The Web still holds plenty for you

CITIPEOPLE.COM

www2.citipeople.com ★★★★

Ever dreamt of making it big in the city? The Web equivalent of a brushed steel and wood-clad loft apartment, the sleek and smooth Citipeople site contains only the finest job vacancies, concentrating on lucrative city banking, finance and technology positions (where else would Barings advertise their vacancies?). Although there are plenty of permanent roles on offer, there's also a good selection of temporary and contract jobs, too. So for something to tide you over (in a kinda lucrative way), this could be the place to search. In keeping with the featured employers, there's bank and international news, plus tips on places to live if you are new to the area (the area in question being London, of course), with guidelines on what you can expect to pay for accommodation. Every job has 'excellent' next to the salary space (don't they know people just want the bottom line?), but you can visit the fascinating salaries survey page for guidance. £100K and stock options, anyone?



Moonlighting: dress carefully

CROSS KEYS

www.xkeys.co.uk ★★★★

Although this is not strictly an employment site, log on here to find out if working for a children's camp is for you. Cross Keys is a group that provides both day and residential camps for kids ('every one of them provides fun, fulfilment and variety to everyone involved') and you can learn all about the fun to be had and the group's deeply sincere and serious philosophy here. The site exists primarily to grab the punters but it also doubles up as a recruitment place, so if the thought of working with kids doesn't make you run screaming in the opposite direction, read on to get a pretty good idea of what the job entails. The staff zone contains various employment-related info, such as the dates when staff are needed, camp philosophy ('progressive and relaxed' were two much-bandied words), pictures of the kids zone to give an idea of activities, plus an application form for those mad – er, sorry – *enthusiastic* enough to want to join in the fun.

SAT UK RECRUITMENT GUIDE

www.recruitonline.co.uk ★★★

Devoid of flash graphics, fancy add-ons – indeed, devoid of anything that might jazz it up – this site won't win any awards for design. But that doesn't really matter as, if you purely want to know where to go to look for part time employment, this is the place. Employment sites are listed along with contact details and, occasionally, a brief description of the agency. And, er, that's it. Brief, simple and to the point, which is sometimes all you need from a decent site. However, although the aforementioned graphics would not be strictly necessary, a little bit of effort with the design and layout would definitely not have gone amiss.

FISH4JOBS

jobs.fish4.co.uk ★★★

A little friendly goldfish is there to guide you around this (very) comprehensive site. With over 30,000 vacancies to check out you might be overwhelmed, but the simple categorisation of job areas makes this an easy site to navigate. Within each category – which range from secretarial, office & support to IT and from sales to construction – are various sub categories. These include news on the relevant career category, training you can do for further development in that field, the best ways to get started and – always important, this – a salary guide to see how competitive your pay is (or not, as the case may be). Although this site is mainly aimed at those seeking full time employment, there are enough part time and temporary vacancies to make this a site worth checking out.

Fish4: more than 30,000 vacancies

MONSTER.CO.UK

www.monster.co.uk ★★★★

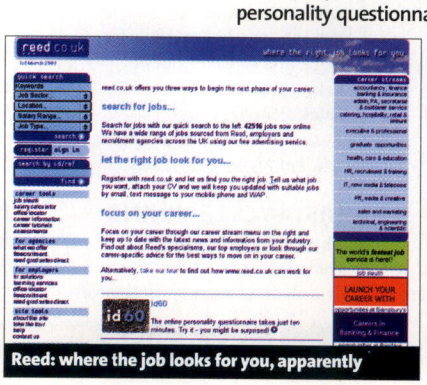
Like the best interview candidates, this site goes that little bit further for you. In among all the jobs on offer is an incredibly helpful 'Creating a CV' section, with informative pointers to what constitutes a good CV ('it should be honest and factual' it says, maybe somewhat unnecessarily). But aside from a few of the stating-the-obvious assertions, most tips are useful – and there's even a sample CV to give an

@ If you have to bookmark one...

REED.CO.UK

www.reed.co.uk ★★★★★

Save yourself a trip to the high street by logging on to Reed Personnel's site and take a virtual look at all the employment opportunities (full or part-time, temporary or contract) that await. Easy to navigate thanks to a simple and clear layout, the site divides into available positions and career advice, with those all-important job-hunting tips. Impressively comprehensive, Reed ('where the right job looks for you') has produced an informative and useful site, with handy job-hunting tips, career sector information with tips specific to that industry, plus a fun online personality questionnaire. There are a huge variety of jobs on offer: how about working as an accounts assistant in South Yorkshire for £4.25 per hour? Or maybe you're a portal specialist in Java and fancy working in Switzerland – it'd be good news for your bank account if you do, because there's £110 an hour up for grabs. If neither fit the bill, don't worry; the choice is huge, whether you want a permanent position or to simply earn a few pennies for your hard-earned hols.



Reed: where the job looks for you, apparently

WORDS: CLAIRE MCHATTIE; PICTURES: REX FEATURES

4 Moonlighters: earn yourself a little extra cash with the Web's help

idea of the preferred format. Elsewhere on the site is a career centre, specialised job search facility, plus an impressive overseas employment section. A clean layout enables quick navigation – essential when you're chasing that dream job and every minute matters.

HOTRECRUIT

www.hotrecruit.co.uk

★★★★

Specialising in temporary and part-time work, this funky site should be able to provide some ideas on what you can do to earn a few extra pennies. Not only can you earn money by going along the usual route of bar work and secretarial positions – of which this site has thousands – but you can also do something that's slightly unusual to raise some extra funds. How about cashing in on your years of being a beach bum by becoming a surf teacher? Or becoming a club DJ in Thailand? Alternatively, put your gymnastic skills to use and perform on TV. Offering a nice mix of the mundane and the unusual, this well laid-out and easy to navigate site almost makes looking for work an interesting task, taking the view that work, and the process of searching for it, doesn't have to be dull.

Searching for work needn't be a dull chore

4MOONLIGHTERS.COM

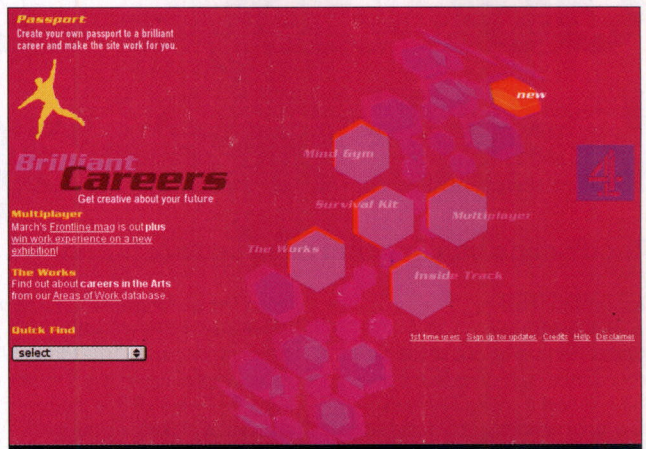
www.4moonlighters.com ★★★★

This site puts a slightly unusual spin on job-hunting: instead of looking at what positions are available, you advertise your skills and wait for potential employers to get in contact. Well, that's the idea anyway. Aimed at people who just want to supplement their income with a bit of spare cash as opposed to those looking for a completely different career path, this is a nice idea. At the time of writing the site was being revamped – presumably just adding a few bells and whistles, and not a total refit – but one future addition will give employers the chance to advertise for 'moonlighters', complementing the current recruitment strategy. Easy to get around and nicely designed, this site is an incredibly useful addition to the part time job-hunting armoury.

Monster: goes that little bit further to find you work

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials



Find yourself a job to be proud of by logging on to Channel 4's Brilliant Careers

EMPLOYMENT SITES

Brilliant Careers

brilliantcareers.channel4.com

Channel 4's frank jobs site is excellent for anyone just entering the big, bad world or for those who have been on the scene for a while. Includes personality tests and advice from people who are experts in their field.

Easy-Jobs

www.easy-jobs.co.uk

Sign up with Easy-Jobs, post your CV, and they'll put you in touch with an employer. Alternatively, if you're looking for staff, Easy-Jobs could find them for you.

Guardian Unlimited Jobs

jobs.guardian.co.uk

Type in the position you're looking for, and watch the matches pile up. *The Guardian*'s site is fast, thorough and easy to use.

totaljobs

www.totaljobs.com

If you really want to upset yourself, check out totaljobs' salary checker to find out how much your boss is ripping you off. Then check out the careers advice section to find yourself a new one.

TV Jobshop

www.tv-jobshop.com

Launched in September 2000 as the first television channel dedicated to recruitment (on BSkyB), TV Jobshop now offers the same services online.

SORT OUT YOUR TAXES

The Desktop Accountant

www.thedesktopaccountant.com

If you're thinking of going freelance, make sure you don't get on the wrong side of the tax man. This site provides free advice and the latest money news.

9 to 5 Cafe: chill out at work

WASTE TIME AT WORK

9 to 5 Cafe

www.9to5cafe.com

With a games, entertainment and mood room to choose from, stressed-out workers are sure to find something to take their mind off work here.

Amused.com

www.amused.com

Silly stories, games and a very excellent stress-relief aquarium are available to download here.

Comics.com

www.comics.com

Top strips – from *Peanuts* to *Dilbert* – to while away the hours.

FunPlanet

www.funplanet.co.uk

Includes arcade games, quizzes, Shockwave and pleasantries for cardsharps.

NEWSGROUP

alt.business.career-opportunities

Seek advice from others here.

JOIN A MAILING LIST

Get free advice on finding or changing employment by sending an email requesting more information to ***JobTips@ibm.net***.

VISIT A CHAT ROOM

www.careerone.com.au

Sign up here to join in discussions with experts in various careers.

NEED MORE? **Useful job addresses** The Directory p86

FOCUS:// Online banks

Goodbye to the bank manager

Tried online banking and been left frustrated? It's time to switch bank...

LLOYDS TSB

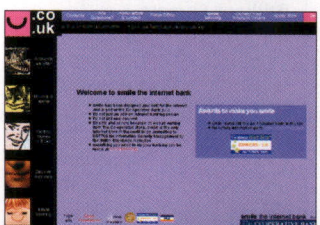
www.lloydstsb.com ★★★

Lloyds TSB may be one of the big four on the high street, but it doesn't quite cut it online. The site suffers from annoying little features, such as too many clicks needed to perform simple tasks, and most of the first main frame is taken up with the fairly pointless option of giving your accounts a nickname. You have to choose an account to access all the regular features, such as paying bills and checking standing orders. But, to do this, you have to keep jumping back (or rather crawling on this slow-loading site) to the first page to work with other accounts. It's not all bad, though – you can set up payments online if the payee is in the bank's database, and you can add anyone to the list with a phone call. But the download statements option is poor, and is effectively useless despite claims of compatibility with Quicken and Money. Hmm – could do better.

SMILE

www.smile.co.uk ★★★★

In financial terms, this is still widely-regarded as the e-bank par excellence. The banking interface is very impressive and easy to use, although perhaps a little too graphics-heavy, making it slow. You can apply for several different types of account by clicking on the smile icon and approval takes place within minutes. Once logged in, click on one of the icons on the toolbar to



Smile: happy days for Net banking

bring up large, easy-to-read tables with tabs along the top giving you access to all the regular functions: pay bills, transfer money, amend or cancel standing orders and so on. Moving money to an account other than your own takes the obligatory four working days, and although Smile is no more guilty than the other banks in this respect, their electronic status gives them far fewer excuses.

ALLIANCE & LEICESTER

www.allianceandleicester.co.uk ★★★

Instant kudos to Alliance & Leicester for the option that allows visually impaired users to enlarge the site and talks them through how to increase font sizes in their browser. But if there was ever a site that needed enlarging, this is it. Despite the pretty cartoons, every page is a typographical mess: the type is minuscule, the tables cramped, the graphics fuzzy and ugly. It also wins the booby prize for the greatest number of stages and screens required to complete the simplest of tasks. However, having said that, all the usual features are present on the site, plus some nice extras such as the option to order foreign currency and travellers cheques online, as well as new stationery. A useful site: if only they could sort those graphics out...

BARCLAYS

ibanking.barclays.co.uk ★★★★

The front page welcomes you with a slow-loading fancy graphic of a woman who looks like she's about to hurl herself off a cliff. Maybe she got sick to death of the new windows that open with almost every click of the mouse. This is a 24/7 site and you can now open an account online which puts Barclays a few steps ahead of the 'bricks and clicks' competition. The first main view in 'Quick Banking' is two drop-down menus, allowing you to select individual accounts or combinations to bring up a summary of your finances; clever, but is it really that useful? There's lots going on with banners flashing and menus on all flanks – not all, or even many, relevant to the task in hand. Otherwise, all the standard features are here in the tree on the right hand side.

HSBC

www.hsbc.co.uk/ebank ★★★

The first thing you see is a time and date stamp showing the last time someone logged into the account, and an invite to call the helpdesk if it wasn't you – a simple but effective security measure. And simple but effective nicely sums up the HSBC site. Select an account and the menu in the left hand frame expands to offer the customary options. You can set up payments for as long as 12 months in advance: perfect for anyone who is psychotically well organised.

FIRST DIRECT

www.firstdirect.com ★★★★

It's easy to hate the annoying marshmallow man, but we love the white on black design and the clear

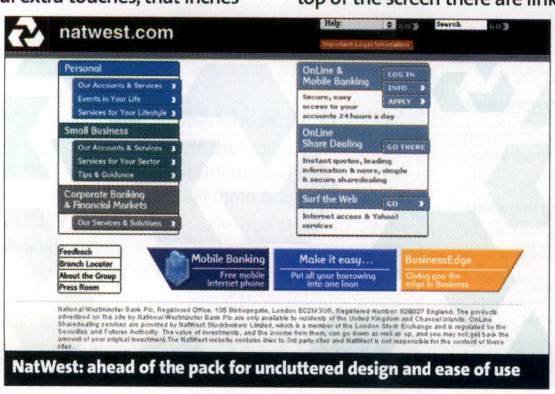
@ If you have to bookmark one...

NATWEST

www.natwest.co.uk ★★★★★

Now that most of the online banks offer a similar level of functionality, the top spot was always going to be a close call, and it's the bold and intuitive design, alongside some simple but thoughtful extra touches, that inches Natwest into pole position. The main frame presents a quick overview of all your NatWest accounts (there's a limit of 20 different accounts, which ought to be more than enough for the vast majority of people). Instead of clicking through numerous unnecessary screens to get to your statements, you simply select an account from the list and its statement appears underneath in the same window: just scroll down to check your most recent transactions, or click on the table to access a handy six months' worth of statements.

The familiar toolbar on the left of the screen lets you set up and pay bills in six categories or transfer money between accounts, and there's even a reminder here of the regulations for putting money into your ISA. At the top of the screen there are links to online help and a useful glossary. NatWest also wins lots of points for supporting by far the widest range of software packages. Of course this is a 3D bank with an online service rather than a dedicated e-bank so as yet you can't open an account online, although you can get the ball rolling. But for its uncluttered, pared down design and ease of use, it's hard to beat.



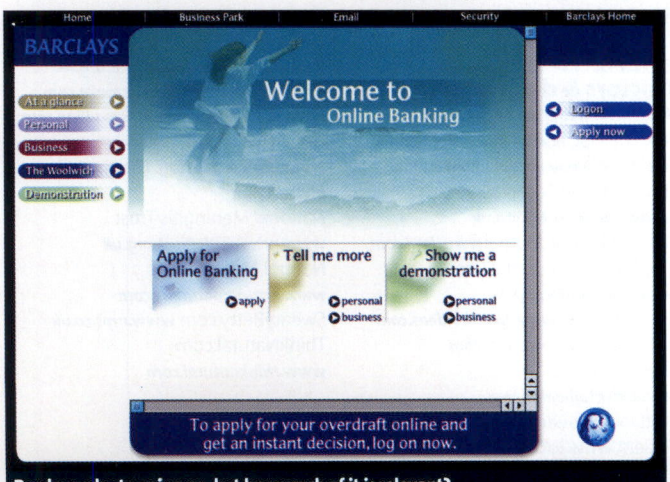
NatWest: ahead of the pack for uncluttered design and ease of use

distinction between data areas and input areas. First Direct has always been a long distance bank, so you'd expect it to have online banking sussed. You can choose between Internet banking and PC banking. You have to download software for the latter, giving you added compatibility with financial management packages for those who like to keep on top of their dosh, and it should save you a few pennies on phone bills. With Internet banking, the account management features are divided into categories that speak for themselves, such as 'Move Money', and you can also open accounts, or apply for loans and credit cards from the same screen. Trustworthy and reliable.

BANK OF SCOTLAND

www.bankofscotland.co.uk ★★★

The Bank of Scotland was established by an Act of Parliament on 17 July 1695, and it appears its online interface was probably designed a few days later. This site has attracted a whole host of plaudits in the past, but it's clearly failed to move with the times – currently the Internet and PC banking services are in disarray. However, the bank *is* in the process of upgrading its pure Internet service and, although that meant it was suspended when we checked, given the bank's previous successes with its online ventures it may be worthwhile going back to check out the refurbished product at a later stage.



Barclays: plenty going on, but how much of it is relevant?

WORDS: CHRIS HADLEY; PICTURES: KOBAL COLLECTION

@ CLASSIC SITES TO BOOKMARK

Web essentials

The Motley Fool UK: highly recommended by *the net* magazine

INVESTING

Citywire.co.uk
www.citywire.co.uk
Company news and advice.

The Motley Fool UK
www.fool.co.uk
One of *the net's* favourite sites, offering helpful advice for the learner investor.

Ask Figaro
www.askfigaro.com
Compare financial products' results here.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Investment Week
www.invweek.co.uk
Monetary advice from the in-depth *Investment Week*.

eye4money
www.eye4money.com
UK and US financial information – plus a share simulation game.

hemscott.NET
www.hemscott.com
Get access to a veritable goldmine of analysis from this easy-to-use, no-nonsense site.

MONEY NEWS AND SHARE PRICES

FT.com
www.ft.com
The mother of all money sites, from the makers of the financial bible.

Bloomberg.com UK
www.bloomberg.co.uk
Up-to-date data for the professional investor.

Sharepages.com
www.sharepages.com
News from all the markets in a quick-glance, easy-to-navigate format.

SHARE TRADING

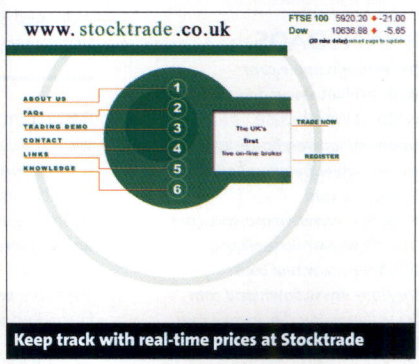
Stocktrade
www.stocktrade.co.uk
Keep your finger on the pulse with this site, which offers real-time prices.

Barclays Stockbrokers
www.barclays-stockbrokers.co.uk
Real-time share dealing from one of the biggest names in banking.

Forex-CMC
www.forex-cmc.co.uk
The first online foreign-exchange dealer.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Interactive Investor International
www.iii.co.uk
Advice for individual investors.



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Guardian Unlimited Money
money.guardian.co.uk
Sound financial advice from *The Guardian*.

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UK finance
uk.finance
Advice on a variety of topics.

CHAT ROOM

Investor MSN
investor.msn.com
Chat with other finance fans.

NEED MORE?
This month's bargains Dealfinder p28
More money addresses The Directory p86

The Directory

Welcome to our exclusive compendium of those top Internet sites you'll need time and again

<BANKING>
Online banks
Abbey National
www.abbeynational.co.uk
Co-operative Bank
www.co-operativebank.co.uk
Direct Line ***www.directline.com***
Egg ***www.egg.co.uk***
Halifax ***www.halifax-online.co.uk***
Nationwide
www.nationwide.co.uk
Virgin Direct
www.virgin-direct.co.uk

<CLASSIFIEDS>
Ad-Mart ***www.ad-mart.co.uk***
Economist Classifieds Market Place
www.classified.economist.com
Eureka-net ***www.eureka-net.co.uk***
Free Classified
www.freeclassified.co.uk
itsbazaar.com ***www.itsbazaar.com***
JJ Electronic Plaza Classifieds
www.jjplaza.com/onlinead
Localads ***www.localads.net***
London's Classifieds
www.mercurie.co.uk/londonclassified
LOOT ***www.loot.com***
netTRADER ***www.nettrader.co.uk***
PhotoAds ***www.photoads.co.uk***
Reel Exchange
www.reelexchange.co.uk
Sellitnet ***www.sellitnet.com***

<DOWNLOADS>
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ICQ ***www.icq.com***
Memoware ***www.memoware.com***
Microsoft ***www.microsoft.com***
Real Player ***www.real.com***
Shareware ***www.download.com***
Shockwave ***www.shockwave.com***
ZDNet ***www.hotfiles.com***

<ENCYCLOPEDIAS>
Encarta ***encarta.msn.com***
Encyclopedia Britannica
www.britannica.com
Encyclopedia.com
www.encyclopedia.com
Funk and Wagnalls
www.funkandwagnalls.com
Illustrated Library
www.illustratedlibrary.com

<FOOD & DRINK>
decanter.com ***www.decanter.com***
e-licious ***www.e-licious.co.uk***
Meals For You ***www.mealsforyou.com***
RecipeWeb.co.uk
www.recipeweb.co.uk

SOCIETY NEW ENTRY

NEW SHADE OF GREEN

With the weather acting strangely and so many food scares about, the state of the planet may be plaguing your mind just about now. So it's a good thing that Care4free.net, the leading ISP dedicated to raising funds and awareness for 500 charities across the UK, has launched BetterPlanet.co.uk. Whether you want to get tips on recycling or find out more on organic foods, you can find it all here. There's even information on how to book a 'green holiday', as well as links to what BetterPlanet feel are the top environmentally-aware sites on the Web.

What we really like about the site is how easy it is to use. Clickable titles are laid out cleanly, begging to be investigated. Want to find out how to make your workplace open to recycling? Or how to do your spring cleaning in a 'green' way? You can find it all here. And if there's a question you can't find the answer to online, just email one of their experts. ***www.betterplanet.co.uk***

Restaurants.co.uk
www.restaurants.co.uk
RoomService ***www.roomservice.co.uk***
Sainsbury's ***www.tasteforlife.co.uk***
squaremeal.co.uk
www.squaremeal.co.uk
Thorntons ***www.thorntons.co.uk***
Toptable ***www.toptable.co.uk***
Uncorked ***www.uncorked.co.uk***

<GAMES>
Guides & companies
Dreamcast ***www.dreamcast.com***
Future Games Network
www.fgnetwork.com
GameCenter ***www.gamecenter.com***
Gamers.com ***www.gamers.com***
GameSpot ***www.gamespot.com***
GameSpyder ***www.gamespyder.com***
GameStats ***www.gamestats.com***
MacGaming
www.maccentral.com/games
MultiPlayer ***www.multiplayer.com***
Nintendo ***www.nintendo.com***
PlayStation ***www.playstation.com***
Sega ***www.sega-europe.com***
Total Video Games
www.totalvideogames.com

<GENEALOGY>
British Ancestral Research
www.brit-a-r.demon.co.uk
British Heraldic Institute
www.kwtelecom.com/heraldry
Family Search ***www.familysearch.com***
Genealogy Research Source
www.genealogy.book www.pro.gov.uk
Rootsweb ***www.rootsweb.com***

<HEALTH>
Doctors & diagnosis
Ask Dr Weil ***cgi.pathfinder.com/drweil***
Ask The Doc ***www.ask-the-doc.com***
BackCare ***www.backpain.org***
British Dental Association
www.bda-dentistry.org.uk
British Medical Journal ***www.bmj.com***
The Brompton Dental Clinic
www.mercuryfree.co.uk
Healthy Ideas ***www.healthyideas.com***
MedRef ***www.medscout.com***
Mental Health
www.mentalhealth.com
NetDoctor ***www.netdoctor.co.uk***
Patient ***www.patient.co.uk***
Pocket Doctor
www.pocketdoctor.co.uk

Support & information
Alcoholics Anonymous
www.alcoholics-anonymous.org
Alzheimer's Disease Society
www.alzheimers.org.uk
Babyzone ***www.babyzone.com***
Cancer Bacup
www.cancerbacup.org.uk
Centre For Online Addiction
netaddiction.com
Diabetes UK ***www.diabetic.org.uk***
Don't Smoke ***www.dontsmoke.com***
Fitness Online ***www.fitnessonline.com***
HIV/AIDS Information & Links
www.brad.ac.uk/staff/ijhodgson/hivlinks.htm
National Meningitis Trust
www.meningitis-trust.org.uk
Natural Naturally
www.naturalnaturally.com
SweatyBetty.com ***www.nrpt.co.uk***
ThinkNatural.com
www.thinknatural.com

<HOMES>
Estate agents
Bushells ***www.bushells.com***
Chancellors ***www.chancellors.co.uk***

WORDS: JENNIFER KEARNS

CityLet ***www.citylet.com***
Cluttons Daniel Smith
www.cluttons.com
Foxtons ***www.foxtons.co.uk***
Friend & Falcke
www.friendandfalcke.co.uk
Goldschmidt Howland
www.goldschmidt-howland.co.uk
Hamptons ***www.hamptons.co.uk***
John D.Wood ***www.johndwood.co.uk***
Knight Frank ***www.knightfrank.co.uk***
Strutt & Parker
www.struttandparker.co.uk
Your Move ***www.your-move.co.uk***

Property finders

Accommodation Directory
www.accommodation.com
Assertahome ***www.assertahome.com***
Bamboo Avenue
www.bambooavenue.com
BBC Good Homes
www.goodhomes.beeb.com
Easier.co.uk ***www.easier.co.uk***
Edinburgh Solicitors Property Centre
www.espc.co.uk
Global Resident
www.globalresident.com
Homefile UK ***www.homefileuk.co.uk***
Home Free Home
www.homefreehome.co.uk
Homepages ***www.homepages.co.uk***
Home Sale ***www.home-sale.co.uk***
Home to Home
www.home-to-home.co.uk
HouseNet ***www.housenet.co.uk***
Internet Property Finder
www.propertyfinder.co.uk
Lets Direct ***www.letsdirect.co.uk***
Move.co.uk ***www.move.co.uk***
Pavilions of Splendour
www.heritage.co.uk
Property Sight
www.property-sight.co.uk
Propwatch ***www.propwatch.com***
UK Property Gold ***www.ukpg.co.uk***

<HUMOUR>

Comedy Online
www.comedyonline.co.uk
Comics.com ***www.comics.com***
Comedy Zone ***www.comedy-zone.net***
Cyber Comedian
webtamers.com/comedian.html
Funplanet ***www.funplanet.co.uk***
Funny ***www.funny.co.uk***
G-Wizz ***www.g-wizz.net***
JokeDepot ***www.jokedepot.com***
JokePost ***www.jokepost.com***
Jongleurs ***www.jongleurs.com***
SoYouWanna.com
www.soyouwanna.com
The Onion ***www.theonion.com***
TV Go Home ***www.tvgohome.com***
Uproar ***www.uproar.com***

<JOBS>

Employment Agencies

Agency Central
www.agencycentral.co.uk
Brook Street ***www.brookstreet.co.uk***
Independent Appointments
www.indappts.co.uk
Manpower ***www.manpower.co.uk***
Reed ***www.reed.co.uk***

Job searches

Brilliant Careers
brilliantcareers.channel4.com
Easy-Jobs ***www.easy-jobs.co.uk***
Expat Network
www.expatnetwork.co.uk
Fish4Jobs ***www.fish4jobs.co.uk***
Gradunet ***www.gradunet.co.uk***
Guardian Unlimited Jobs
jobs.guardian.co.uk
Jobsearch UK ***www.jobsearch.co.uk***
Jobsin ***www.jobsin.co.uk***
Jobsite ***www.jobsite.co.uk***
Overseas Jobs ***www.overseasjobs.com***
Personnelnet ***www.personnelnet.com***
Stepstone ***www.stepstone.co.uk***
totaljobs ***www.totaljobs.com***
TV Jobshop ***www.tv-jobshop.com***
Wide Eyes ***www.wideyes.com***
Yelcom ***www.yelcom.com***

<KIDS>

0-8

Babynames.com
www.babynames.com
Babyzone ***www.babyzone.com***
Cartoon Network
www.cartoonnetwork.co.uk
CITV ***www.citv.co.uk***
Diggit ***www.diggit.co.uk***
Fox Kids ***www.foxkids.co.uk***
FunSchool ***www.funschool.com***
Kidscom ***www.kidscom.com/orakc/Mousers/mouse.html***
Mother & Baby Magazine
www.motherandbaby.co.uk
Nickelodeon ***www.nickjr.com***
Sesame Street
www.sesamestreet.com/preschool

8 plus

AJ Kids ***www.ajkids.com***
Anything!Student
www.anythingstudent.com
Atkidz.com ***www.atkidz.com***
ChildU ***www.childu.com***
Club-Z ***www.club-z.com***
Disney.co.uk ***www.disney.co.uk***
EduWeb ***www.eduweb.co.uk***
Eyebeauty ***www.eyebeauty.com***
Family Education
www.familyeducation.com
BJ Pinchbeck Homework Helper
www.bjpinchbeck.com
MatMice ***www.matmice.com***
Pupiline.net ***www.pupiline.net***
S-Cool! ***www.s-cool.co.uk***
StudentUK ***www.studentuk.com***
Teen Advice ***www.teenadvice.net***
Teen Scene ***www.teen-scene.com***
Thunk ***www.thunk.com***
Wizziwiz.co.uk ***www.wizziwiz.co.uk***
Yahooligans ***www.yahooligans.com***

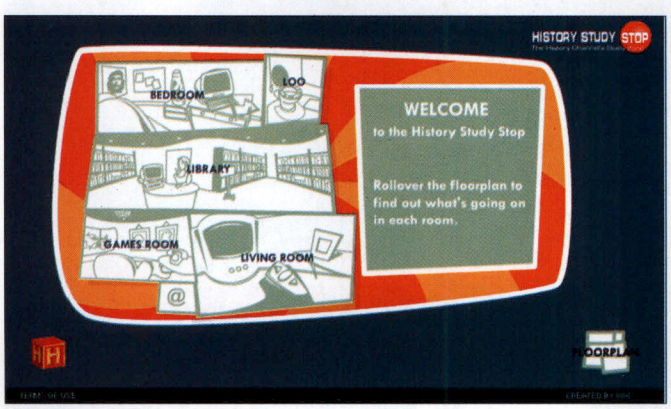
<LAW>

Cyberlawyer
cyberlawyer.city2000.com
Desktop Lawyer
www.desktoplawyer.freeserve.net
Divorce Online
www.divorce-online.co.uk
Law Assure ***www.lawassure.co.uk***
Law Rights ***www.lawright.co.uk***
Law Solutions ***www.lawsolutions.co.uk***
Legaldocs ***www.legaldocs.com***
UK Law Online
www.leeds.ac.uk/law/hamlyn

<MAGAZINES>

Online mags

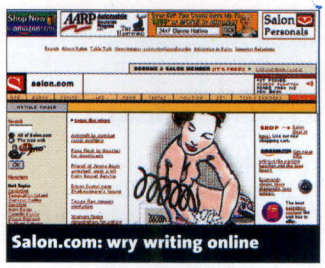
Foocha ***www.foocha.com***
Garbled Communications UK
www.geocities.com/SunsetStrip/Show/1322



KIDS NEW ENTRY

THE PAST COMES ALIVE ONLINE

The History Channel have done something seemingly impossible: they've made the act of researching a hoot. In addition to being an extremely satisfying site to move around in (Flash-tastic and painted in muted hues, with sounds popping up where you least expect them), the site holds a heck of a lot of information. The site's designed in the form of a house, with the various rooms representing different content (the library stores articles, the games room provides fun entertainment, the bedroom has exam tips, etc.). Additionally, there are special offers for those interested in the pursuit of knowledge, and an opportunity to chat with students and history enthusiasts. ***www.historystudystop.co.uk***



Salon.com: wry writing online

Salon.com ***www.salon.com***
Seven ***www.sevenmag.com***
Slate ***www.slate.com***
Suck ***www.suck.com***

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Top Networks

BT Cellnet ***www.btcellnet.net***
One 2 One ***www.one2one.co.uk***
Orange ***www.orange.co.uk***
Virgin ***www.virginmobile.com***
Vodaphone ***www.vodafone.co.uk***

Ringtones & Logos

a2bwap ***www.a2bwap.com***
Be Mobile ***www.yellphone.com***
Jippii! ***www.jippii.co.uk***
MonsterMob ***www.monstermob.com***
Ringtones Online
www.ringtones.co.uk
tones4fones ***www.tones4fones.com***
YourMobile ***www.yourmobile.com***

<MONEY>

Financial & investment guides

Citywire ***www.citywire.co.uk***
DigitalLook.com ***www.digitallook.com***
Eye4Money ***www.eye4money.com***
Financial Times ***www.ft.com***
Interactive Investor ***www.iii.co.uk***
Money Unlimited
www.moneyunlimited.co.uk
Motley Fool ***www.fool.co.uk***
Sharepages ***www.sharepages.com***
Stocktrade ***www.stocktrade.co.uk***
TaxAssist Direct Ltd
www.taxassist.co.uk

<MOTORING>

Car manufacturers

Audi ***www.audi.co.uk***
BMW ***www.bmw.co.uk***
Citroen ***www.citroen.co.uk***
Ferrari ***www.ferrari.it***
Fiat ***www.fiat.co.uk***
Ford ***www.ford.co.uk***
Honda ***www.honda.co.uk***
Jaguar ***www.jaguarcars.com***
Lotus ***www.lotuscars.co.uk***
Mazda ***www.mazda.co.uk***
Mercedes-Benz
www.mercedes-benz.co.uk
Nissan ***www.nissan-europe.com***
Peugeot ***www.peugeot.co.uk***
Porsche ***www.porsche.co.uk***
Rover ***www.rover.co.uk***
Toyota ***www.toyota.co.uk***
Volkswagen ***www.volkswagen.co.uk***
Volvo ***www.volvocars.volvo.co.uk***

<MUSEUMS & GALLERIES>

Imperial War Museum
www.iwm.org.uk »

National Gallery
www.nationalgallery.org.uk
Natural History Museum
www.nhm.ac.uk
Tate Gallery ***www.tate.org.uk***

<MUSIC>
Artists, DJs & radio
The Beatles
www.thebeatleswebsite.com
Blur ***www.blur.co.uk***
David Bowie ***www.davidbowie.com***
Coldplay ***www.coldplay.com***
Fatboy Slim
www.normancook.cjb.net
Gilles Peterson ***gpww.iscool.net***
Kylie Minogue ***www.kylie.com***
MJ Cole ***www.mjcole.com***
Radiohead ***www.radiohead.co.uk***
REM ***www.remhq.com***
Spice Girls ***c3.vmg.co.uk/spicegirls***
Stereophonics
www.stereophonics.co.uk
Travis ***www.travisonline.com***
Vdance ***www.vdance.co.uk***
Westlife ***www.westlife.co.uk***
WOD1.com ***www.wod1.com***

MP3
BeSonic ***www.besonic.com***
Brand New Music
www.brandnewmusic.com
Clickmusic ***www.clickmusic.co.uk***
Crunch ***www.crunch.co.uk***
Getsigned.com ***www.get-signed.com***
Getsigned.com ***www.get-signed.com***
Mp3.com ***www.mp3.com***
Popwire ***www.popwire.com***
Vitaminic ***www.vitaminic.co.uk***

Online mixing
DJSounds.com ***www.djsounds.com***
eJay ***www.ejay.com***
Getoutthere ***www.getoutthere.bt.com***
Hobomusic ***www.hobomusic.com***
Home Recording
www.homerecording.com
Mouse Jam ***www.mousejam.com***
Scratch It ***www.turntable.de***
SS7X7 ***www.ss7x7.com***

<NEWS>
Newspapers
Daily Telegraph ***www.telegraph.co.uk***
Guardian Unlimited
www.guardianunlimited.co.uk
The Independent
www.independent.co.uk
MegaStar ***www.megastar.co.uk***
The Mirror ***www.mirror.co.uk***
News Of The World
www.notw.co.uk
Scotsman ***www.thescotsman.co.uk***
The Sun ***www.thesun.co.uk***
The Times ***www.the-times.co.uk***

News services
ABC News ***www.abcnews.go.com***
BBC ***news.bbc.co.uk***
CNN ***www.cnn.co.uk***
ITN ***www.itn.co.uk***
NewsNow ***www.newsnow.co.uk***
PA News ***www.pa.press.net***
Reuters ***www.reuters.com/news***

<PEOPLE FINDERS>
Email addresses
Bigfoot ***bigfoot.com***
EmailFinder ***www.emailfinder.com***
Friends Reunited
www.friendsreunited.co.uk
People Site ***www.peoplesite.com***
WhoWhere ***www.whowhere.com***
Yahoo ***people.yahoo.com***

Phone numbers
BT Directory Enquiries
www.bt.co.uk/phonenetuk
Thomson Directories
www.thomweb.co.uk
Yellow Pages ***www.yell.co.uk***

<SCIENCE>
News & updates
BBC Science ***news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/sci/tech/default.htm***
einstein.tv ***www.einstein.tv***
Eureka Alert ***www.eurekalert.org***
NASA ***science.nasa.gov***
New Scientist
www.newscientist.com
WhyFiles ***whyfiles.news.wisc.edu***

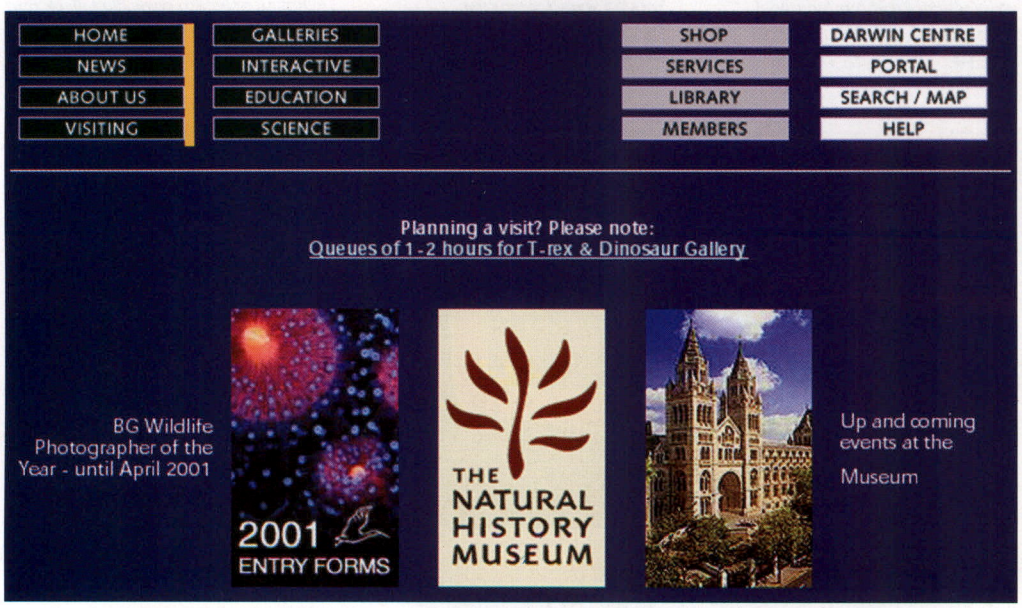
<SEARCH ENGINES>
AltaVista ***www.altavista.digital.com***
Ask Jeeves ***www.askjeeves.com***
Dogpile ***www.dogpile.com***
Electric Library ***www.elibrary.com***
FAST ***alltheweb.com***
Google ***www.google.com***
HotBot ***www.hotbot.com***
Inter-Change ***www.inter-change.com***

Metacrawler: searching made easy

Lycos ***www.lycos.com***
MetaCrawler ***www.metacrawler.com***
Mirago ***www.mirago.co.uk***
Northern Light ***www.nlsearch.com***

<SHOPPING>
Online auctions
Auction Hunter
www.auctionhunter.com
Auction Universe
www.auctionuniverse.co.uk
Bid4sport ***www.bid4sport.co.uk***
eBay ***www.ebay.co.uk***
eBid ***www.ebid.co.uk***
eSwap ***www.eswap.co.uk***
Eurobid ***www.eurobid.com***
Last Minute ***www.lastminute.com***
QXL ***www.qxl.com***
What Am I Bid? ***www.whatamibid.com***

Shopping directories
Best of British ***www.bestofbritish.com***
BritishShopping.com
www.british-shopping.com
Centreshop ***www.centreshop.com***
CleverPants ***www.cleverpants.com***
Coppernob Shopping.com
www.coppernobshopping.com
Cotswold Essential Outdoor
www.cotswold-outdoor.com
Crocus ***www.crocus.co.uk***
eDirectory ***www.edirectory.co.uk***
Enterprise City
www.enterprisecity.co.uk
The Gift Delivery Company
www.giftdeliveryco.com
Glasses-On-The-Web.Com
www.glasses-on-the-web.com
IMRG ***shops.imrg.org***
Inshop.co.uk ***www.inshop.co.uk***
Internet Shopping
www.internetshopping.com
Island Trading
www.island-trading.com
myTaxi ***www.mytaxi.co.uk***
ShopGuide ***www.shopguide.co.uk***
Shoppers Universe
shoppersuniverse.com
Shopping Superstore
www.shoppingsuperstore.co.uk
Shopping UK
www.internetics.co.uk/shop
ShopSmart ***www.shopsmart.com***
Shops On The Net ***www.sotn.com***
Shop Spy ***www.shopspy.co.uk***
Splendour.com ***www.splendour.com***
TopUKWebsites
www.topukwebsites.com
Shopping Zone ***ukshoppingzone.co.uk***
Virgin Net ***www.virgin.net/shopping***
Virtual Mall ***www.thevirtualmall.co.uk***
ValueMad ***www.valuemad.com***
Wedding List ***www.wedding.co.uk***



SCIENCE SPOTLIGHT

HEAD BACK TO NATURE

Now that we know what staff and visitors at The Natural History Museum surf for (see Discoveries, page 21), we thought it only right to spotlight this informative, easy-to-use site. Great for anyone who's planning a visit to the Museum or, alternatively, people who just have an interest in the natural sciences, there's tons to look at and do here.

Most impressive is the live ant cam, as well as the series of still images demonstrating the changing seasons in the Museum's garden. There's even an opportunity to view some of the galleries via a panoramic Webcam. All the information you'll need if you are planning a trip is available for you to peruse online: from ticket prices to a map of the area to a floorplan.

In addition, The Natural History Museum Web site is a great learning tool. Kids (or curious adults) can find out about dinosaurs from a fantastic Dino Directory. It includes 150 different dinosaurs, complete with images. And if you're looking for a perfect gift for someone with an interest in science, why not visit the Museum's online bookshop? ***www.nhm.ac.uk***

<LIFESTYLE & FASHION>

Main sites

BeautyLink ***www.beautylink.com***
Boxfresh ***www.boxfresh.co.uk***
Cosmopolitan ***www.cosmomag.com***
Defining Edge ***www.definingedge.com***
Fotango ***www.fotango.com***
Fashion And Beauty Internet Association ***www.fbia.com***
Fashionfile ***www.fashionfile.com***
Fashion Mall ***www.fashionmall.com***
FashionNet ***www.fashion.net***
Lifebyte ***www.lifebyte.com***
Models.com ***www.models.com***
TheRumour ***www.therumour.com***
Salonweb ***www.salonweb.com***
Style Experts ***www.stylexperts.com***
Vogue ***www.vogue.com***

<SPORT>

FA Premiership clubs

Arsenal ***www.arsenal.co.uk***
Aston Villa ***www.astonvilla-fc.co.uk***
Bradford City ***www.bradfordcityfc.co.uk***
Charlton Athletic ***www.charlton-athletic.co.uk***
Chelsea ***www.chelseafc.co.uk***
Coventry City ***www.ccfc.co.uk***
Derby County ***www.dcfc.co.uk***
Everton ***www.evertonfc.com***
Ipswich Town ***www.itfc.co.uk***
Leeds United ***www.lufc.co.uk***
Leicester City ***www.lcfc.co.uk***
Liverpool ***www.liverpoolfc.net***
Manchester City ***www.mcfc.co.uk***
Manchester United ***www.manutd.com***
Middlesbrough ***www.mfc.co.uk***
Newcastle United ***www.nufc.co.uk***
Southampton ***www.saintsfc.co.uk/index.htm***
Sunderland ***www.sunderland-afc.com***
Tottenham Hotspur ***www.spurs.co.uk***
West Ham Utd ***www.whufc.co.uk***

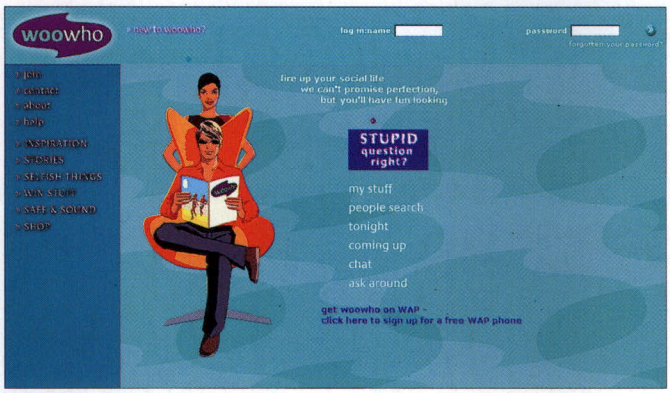
Sport A-Z

Athletics ***www.nuff-respect.co.uk***
Cricket ***www.cricket4.com***
Cycling ***www.cycleweb.co.uk***
Fishing ***www.anglersnet.co.uk***
Football ***www.football365.com***
Formula One ***www.itv-f1.com***
Golf ***www.golfweb.com***
Hockey ***www.fieldhockey.com***
Martial Arts ***www.martial-arts-network.com***
Motorsport ***www.autosport.com***
Motorbike Racing ***www.motograndprix.com***
Racing ***www.racingpost.co.uk***
Rugby League ***www.rleague.com***
Rugby Union ***www.scrum.com***
Snooker ***www.snookernet.com***
Tennis ***www.tennis.com***
Wrestling ***www.wwf.com***

<TELEVISION>

Top shows

Big Breakfast ***bigbreakfast.channel4.com***
Brookside ***www.brookie.com***
EastEnders ***www.bbc.co.uk/eastenders***
Friends ***friends.warnerbros.com***
Hollyoaks ***www.hollyoaks.com***



LIFESTYLE NEW ENTRY

SURF FOR A NEW ROMANCE

Following on from our online dating feature in last month's What Website?, here's yet another chance to meet someone over the Net. Launched in November 2000, Woowho already boasts thousands of users in the UK, ranging from 25 to 45 years old. But matchmaking isn't their only selling point. The site also offers an events listing, chat, reviews and games.

At the time of writing, Woowho was free to join. However, they will start charging shortly. Members receive a profile page, email and voicemail accounts, and WAP services. It's the 21st Century version of seeing someone across a room!

www.woowho.co.uk

The League of Gentlemen ***www.roystonvasey.co.uk***
Neighbours ***www.neighbours.com***
Who Wants To Be A Millionaire? ***www.phone-a-friend.com***

TV companies

BBC ***www.bbc.co.uk***
Channel Four ***www.channel4.co.uk***
Channel Five ***www.channel5.co.uk***
E4 ***www.e4.com***
ITV ***www.itv.co.uk***
ONdigital ***www.ondigital.co.uk***
Sky ***www.sky.co.uk***

<TRAVEL>

Airlines

Air Canada ***www.aircanada.ca***
Air France ***www.airfrance.com***
American Airlines ***www.aa.com***
Britannia ***www.britanniaairways.com***
BA ***www.british-airways.com***
BM ***www.iflybritishmidland.com***
Buzz ***www.buzzaway.com***
Continental ***www.flycontinental.com***
easyJet ***www.easyjet.com***
Go ***www.go-fly.com***
Iberia ***www.iberia.com***
KLM ***www.klmuk.com***
Lufthansa ***www.lufthansa.com***
Qantas ***www.qantas.com.au***
Ryanair.com ***www.ryanair.com***
United Airlines ***www.ual.com***
Virgin Atlantic Airways ***www.virgin-atlantic.co.uk***

Destination guides

Amsterdam ***www.channels.nl***
Australia ***australia-online.com***
Bargainholidays ***www.bargainholidays.com***
Caribbean ***www.caribbean-travel.com***
Caribbean Islands ***www.gopelican.com***
Cheaperholidays ***www.cheaperholidays.com***
France ***www.franceway.com***
Germany ***www.germany-tourism.de***
Greece ***www.gogreece.com***
India ***www.indiagov.org***
Italy ***www.travel.it***
Ireland ***www.12travel.co.uk***
Japan ***www.jnto.go.jp***
Scottish Tourist Board Web site ***www.visitscotland.com***
Spain ***www.red2000.com***
UK ***www.exploreukland.co.uk***
US ***www.go-unitedstates.com***

Ferries

Ferry Savers ***www.ferrysavers.co.uk***
P&O ***www.poef.com/poef/index.htm***

P&O Ferries: travel with the waves

Travel Britain ***www.travelbritain.com/UKPassengerFerries.html***
Travel.World ***www.travel.world.co.uk/ferries.htm***
UK Camp Site ***ukcampsite.co.uk***

Rail travel

Euro Railways ***www.eurorailways.com***
Great Eastern Railway ***www.ger.co.uk***
Great Westernm Trains ***www.great-western-trains.co.uk***
Railtrack ***www.railtrack.co.uk***
Scotrail ***www.scotrail.co.uk***
UK Public Transport ***www.pti.org.uk***
Virgin Trains ***www.virgintrains.co.uk***

Travel agents

Airtickets ***www.airtickets.co.uk***
Bargain Holidays ***www.bargainholidays.org***
Biztravel ***www.biztravel.com***
Usit Campus ***www.usitcampus.co.uk***
ebookers ***www.ebookers.com***
Expedia ***www.expedia.co.uk***
Holiday Deals ***www.holidaydeals.com***
Holiday Wizard ***www.holidaywizard.co.uk***
Internet Travel ***www.itsnet.co.uk***
Last Minute ***www.lastminute.com***
STA Travel ***www.statravel.co.uk***
First Resort ***www.thefirstresort.com***
Thomas Cook ***www.thomascook.co.uk***
Thomson ***www.thomson-holidays.com***
Trailfinders ***www.trailfinder.com***
Travel Choice ***www.travelchoice.co.uk***

<WECAMS>

Directories

Allcam ***www.allcam.com***
Camcity ***www.camcity.com***
Digital Camera ***www.dcn.com***
FlyOnTheWall.com ***www.flyonthewall.com***
Webcam Central ***www.camcentral.com***
WebCam World ***www.webcamworld.com***
Webviews ***www.webviews.co.uk***

Our Favourites

AfriCam ***www.africam.com***
Jennicam ***www.jennicam.org***
Ultimate Taxi ***www.ultimatetaxi.com***
Howletts Zoo ***howletts.net***
WalfordCam ***www.bbc.co.uk/eastenders/webcam/index.shtml***

<WEB CENSORS>

Cybersnoop ***www.pearlsw.com***
Cyber Patrol ***www.cyberpatrol.com***
Net Nanny ***www.netnanny.com***
Xcheck ***www.xcheck.net***

<WEB DIRECTORIES>

About.com ***www.about.com***
4anything ***www.4anything.com***
AOL Netfind ***www.aol.com/netfind***
Excite ***www.excite.com***
Infoseek ***infoseek.go.com***
Liszt (mailing lists) ***www.liszt.com***
LookSmart ***www.looksmart.com***
Open Directory ***www.dmoz.org***
Thomson ***www.thomweb.co.uk***
WebCrawler ***www.webcrawler.com***
Yahoo! ***www.yahoo.com***
Yell ***www.yell.co.uk***

<WORLD GOVERNMENT>

Australia ***www.fed.gov.au***
China ***www.gov.cn***
European Commission ***europa.eu.int***
France ***www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr***
Germany ***www.bundesregierung.de***
Russia ***www.gov.ru***
United States ***www.whitehouse.gov***

dedicated servers

dedicated-servers.co.uk

After months of planning and implementation, the new WebFusion Data Centre is now open. WebFusion have spent over £1 million creating the UK's most advanced web hosting data facility, featuring all the key facilities demanded by dedicated server customers. APC Symmetra UPS, FM200 fire supression, 250kW backup generator, Cat 2 lighting, 100Mb network, Cisco switches and routers, Ultra grade aircon & climate control, water detection, CCTV, swipe entry and state of the art fire and intruder alarms.

All servers come complete with 2 IP addresses and 5GB bandwidth per month, and link to all WebFusion's data centre facilities plus multiple fast internet connections.

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The high-end 'Web-in-a-Box' solution. Easy to control, no jargon or systems knowhow req'd. Ideal for resellers who don't want to be 'techiebods', web designers, etc. Fast, well spec'd machines, ready to run, 2 IP addresses, 5GB bandwidth per month and fast internet connections.

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Win2K/NT SPECIAL

The internet environment for Windows specialists. Ideal for MCSE/MSCP's, VB programmers, projects that need MS Office backend and/or ASP support. Fully spec'd machines with NT pre-installed, 2 IP addresses, 5GB bandwidth per month, & multiple internet connections.

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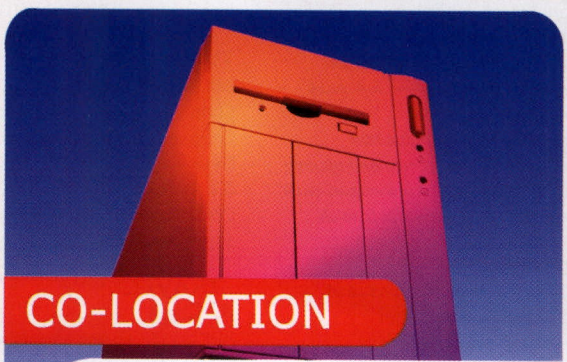

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Your machine, our Datacenter. Any OS, any spec. Ideal for dedicated purpose machines, high-end resellers and 'part of the network' business webservers. 2 IP addresses, 5GB bandwidth per month allocation, with multiple fast internet connections.

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Everyone uses the Internet in different ways. Some people use it regularly at work or at college; others spend their evenings browsing at home; still more will log on for just a couple of minutes every day. At Freeserve we offer you a choice of great-value ways to access the Internet, putting you in control of your charges. Freeserve AnyTime allows you free Internet calls at any time of day for just £12.99 a month. Then there's Freeserve HomeTime, which gives BT users unmetered access from 6pm until 8am during the week and all day at weekends – you simply pay a flat monthly fee on top of your BT phone bill. And Freeserve No Ties just lets you pay as you go, simply charging you the price of a local phone call while you're online. You can find more information on all these packages at ***www.freeserve.com/time***.

Finally, there's FreeservePlus, the new high-speed Broadband service for both homes and businesses. FreeservePlus for home works on a flat-fee basis of just £39.99 a month, plus a one-off installation charge of £150. For more details and information for businesses, see ***www.freeserve.com/plus***.

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Imagine what it must be like to receive post at any time of the day or night, within seconds of when it was sent. Well, that's exactly how email works. And with Freeserve, you don't have to pay a penny. Messages are free to send and receive – all you pay is the cost of the Internet connection call.

And now you have even more choice. Thanks to FSmail, our Web-based email service, you can check your Freeserve email from anywhere in the world – all you need is an Internet terminal. For more information, see ***www.fsmail.net***.

MOBILE INTERNET

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TALKING EMAIL

If you don't have a mobile Internet phone, you can still access your emails when you're away from your computer – by using Speechmail. This clever service reads your email messages to you over your mobile or wired phone using a special electronic voice. And as you would expect, there's no subscription charge for Freeserve members.

To use the service, simply sign up at the address below. You'll be given a personal phone number which you can ring to access your email. So no matter how important the message, you won't need to be at your computer screen to receive it.
www.freeserve.com/communications

YOUR OWN WEB SPACE

Once you've started looking around the Internet, chances are you'll be keen to build your own site. Well, now that's easy, thanks to some great benefits you'll receive as a Freeserve member.

We'll give you a massive 15 megabytes of free space in which to create your own site. You can make your site about absolutely anything you want – your favourite pop star, football team or even yourself! The free software on the Freeserve installation CD,

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which you use to sign up as a member, makes it easy to get your site up and running. With the help of Freeserve, you'll soon be at home on the Internet.

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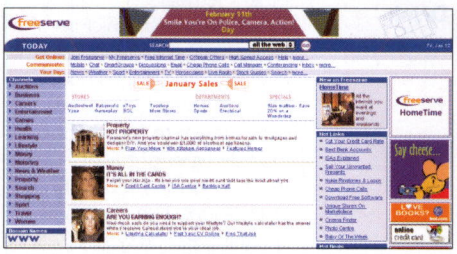
As well as free Web space, unlimited free emails and a choice of Internet access packages, we're also dedicated to bringing you the very best content on the Internet and collecting it all under one roof, on the Freeserve Today page at ***www.freeserve.com***.



To make the most of Today, make it your homepage on the Web and check it every day to get a digest of all the latest news, weather and sport. You can even customise the Today page to suit your personal interests and then explore events more thoroughly on the relevant channels – there are 18 of them!

FREESERVE FOR EVERY PART OF YOUR LIFE

Freeserve has a channel to suit every part of your life. Try the feature-packed Lifestyle channel, follow the stars with Entertainment, plan a holiday with Travel or buy your CDs, books and much more on Shopping. If you

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Finally, our email newsletter will keep you up to date with everything that's going on at Freeserve. It's all at ***www.freeserve.com***.

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A-Z CHANNEL GUIDE

WITH 18 CHANNELS TO CHOOSE FROM, THERE'S SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

Auctions

Bid online for almost any item imaginable!

Business

Whether you've got an established business or you've just started out, Clearlybusiness.com, backed by both Freeserve and Barclays, can offer you support and advice. They can help you get your business online, too.

Careers

You're wired, now get hired, not fired! The Careers channel lets you search databases of 70,000 jobs nationwide. You can apply online to jobs you want, or submit your CV and wait for employers in your area to come to you!

Chat

The new, improved chat service is a great hit. You can use our 3D chat rooms to get around and explore virtual worlds, set up your own chat groups, even talk to the stars with our new celebrity chat section.

Entertainment

All the latest film, music and television news can be found on Freeserve Entertainment. This is also where to buy CDs, books, DVDs and concert tickets online. And now you can listen to the radio over the Web as well!

Games

If you're a games addict you'll want to keep up with Freeserve Games. Read reviews of the latest games, visit the virtual shop, pick up some top cheating tips and indulge yourself by playing online!

Health

The Freeserve Health channel will help you stay in tip-top condition, with information and advice on everything from the latest medical breakthroughs to alternative medicine.

Learning

From primary school right through to A-level and beyond, Freeserve Learning can help you and your family through your studies with its stimulating interactive learning environment.

Lifestyle

Lifestyle has everything for the way you live your life, online and off.

Money

Keep your finances healthy with expert advice from the Money channel. Whether you want savings tips, a mortgage, or advice on choosing an ISA, you can keep your pocket full with Freeserve.

Motoring

Get on the road with the Freeserve Motoring channel, your one-stop shop for all your motoring needs. From insurance to breaking motoring news and reviews of the latest car models, you'll find it all on Motoring.

News and Weather

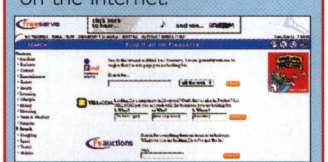
Get tomorrow's papers today with this superb news service. Read the national and international news as it happens, plus business, entertainment and sports news, and the weather.

Property

From finding the right mortgage to sorting the decorators from the cowboys, on Freeserve Property you'll find everything you'll need to move into a new house or flat and turn it into your dream home.

Search

Use Freeserve Search to look for anything you could want on the Internet.

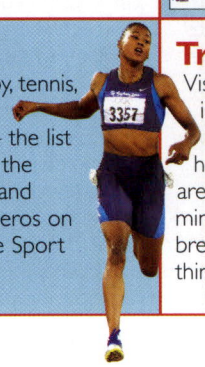


Shopping

At the Freeserve Shopping channel you can find a huge range of items, from flowers or food to a CD or a computer. Look out for great deals and savings from SHOP@freeserve and the new marketplace retailers.

Sport

Football, rugby, tennis, cricket, golf, motorsport – the list goes on. Get the latest results and follow your heros on the Freeserve Sport channel.



Travel

Visit the Travel channel for instant access to a database of 70,000 flights and holidays worldwide. There are always sensational last-minute deals, plus weekend breaks and car hire – everything for the perfect holiday!

Women

Web women need look no further than the Freeserve women's channel, icircle.com, which has everything from shopping, health and beauty to sex and relationships, careers and travel. Read your horoscope here, too.

PICTURES: IMAGE BANK, P.A.

Make a meal of it

The new-look Food and Drink area of Freeserve Lifestyle is a gastronomic paradise for cooks new and novice

You've casually invited some mates round for dinner, but when you look in the fridge five minutes before they arrive, all you can find is a piece of old cheese, a cold sausage and half a tin of tomatoes. If this is you, you'll be thanking your lucky stars for the Recipe Finder in the new-look Food and Drink section on the Freeserve Lifstyle channel, at *www.freeserve.com/lifestyle*. Simply enter your rather unlikely main ingredients and the Recipe Finder will come up with a range of delicious meals using a few other bits and bobs from the store cupboard. But if you're a little more organised, you can really wow your friends by cooking them a three-course meal from the Entertainment section. You'll find mouth-watering recipes for almost every type of meal, whether it's a romantic dinner or a simple light supper. There are even clever suggestions for canapés or nibbles if you're having a posh 'do', and ways to impress at the last minute or if you're on a tight budget. And if you've decided what you'd like to cook but need a recipe, you'll find a selection of versions to choose from for almost every dish you can think of.

Find recipes for every occasion at Food and Drink

If you're planning a party, you'll find all sorts of ideas to make it go with a bang, whatever the occasion. Of course, the really important part will be in the drinks guide, which includes everything you need to know about which wines or beers to serve, as well as recipes for cocktails and punches, and the all-important hangover cures for the morning after...

Food and Drink also has a wine guide and a whole section dedicated to organic produce. And a real treat is the Restaurant Guide, which provides details of over 25,000 restaurants in the UK, many with critical reviews by experts from Taste, plus ratings and a budget indicator so you can be sure that whenever you eat out, you eat well for a price you're happy to pay. The detailed search facility means you can search by name for a restaurant you've heard about, and even read comments by other members of the public for an even clearer picture of what to expect. The Guide is invaluable, too, if you know what you want but you don't know where to find it. Choose from 36 types of cuisine – from Italian to Indian, Modern British to traditional Fish and Chips – and the area you want to eat in to find the ideal restaurant near you; or just look up all the restaurants in your area and see what takes your fancy. Once you've chosen your restaurant, you can book it online with the new real time facility, Book2eat. Foodies will be in seventh heaven with they visit Food and Drink! Go to *www.freeserve.com/lifestyle*

Entertain in style

Identify yourself

Domain names are the parts of Internet and email addresses like freeserve.com or fsauctions.co.uk. Choosing a memorable one for yourself or your business is a great way of helping people find you on the Web. While many of the most obvious domain names have already been bought, there are still loads left, whether you want to be .com, .co.uk, or .net. If you want to buy a domain name, you can do it through Freeserve. We offer four types of domain name registration, and with prices starting at just £49+VAT for a year's ownership, they're all great value.

Buy your own domain name

If the domain name you want is already taken, Freeserve will suggest close alternatives for you. And if you're stuck even for an initial idea, Raining Names will come up with suggestions based on your chosen key words and themes.

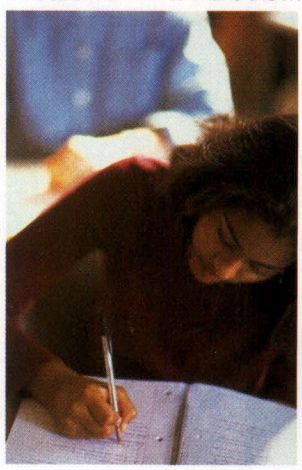
If you're not happy with the result, don't worry: there will soon be thousands more domain names, thanks to new endings such as .biz for small businesses and .info for information sites. For more information, look for the 'fsdomains' box on Freeserve Today, at *www.freeserve.com*.

Pass your exams

With SATs and GSCEs looming, Freeserve is providing special help with revision to guarantee exam success. In association with learn.co.uk and *The Guardian*, Learning is offering a range of interactive material to make homework stimulating – just what's needed as exams approach. There's complete coverage of key stages 3 and 4 for maths, science, English language and English literature, as well as key stage 4 for French. GCSE history and geography will be added toward the end of April.

Students will be able to use online lessons to review every subject on the curriculum. They can check their understanding in maths and science with literally billions of random tests; and, with the unique sound facility, they can listen to and improve their modern languages skills, too.

Exams are easy with Freeserve



In fact, all the content on Freeserve Learning is designed to make the most of the Internet environment, and all of it has been approved by a panel of British teachers to ensure that it is of the highest quality possible. With the Freeserve Learning channel, exams can be a doddle. *www.freeserve.com/learning*

Mobile magic

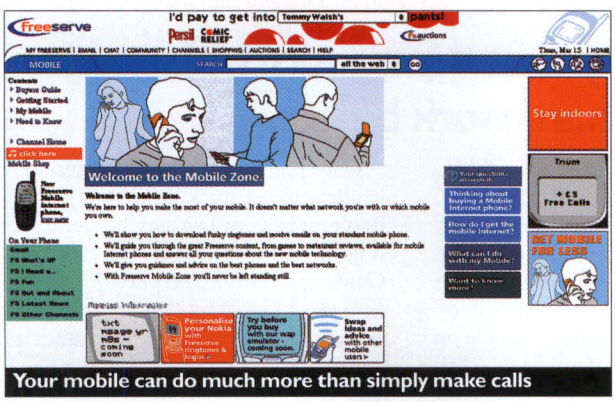
Your mobile is much more than it seems

If you think your mobile phone is simply a great way to make calls while you're on the move, you're wrong. Now your mobile can do a lot more for you. The most popular alternative use for mobiles is for sending SMS – or text – messages. And with Freeserve you can also receive FSAlerts, text messages from Freeserve that tell you when you've received an email, and which give you the beginning of the email so you know how urgently to look in your inbox.

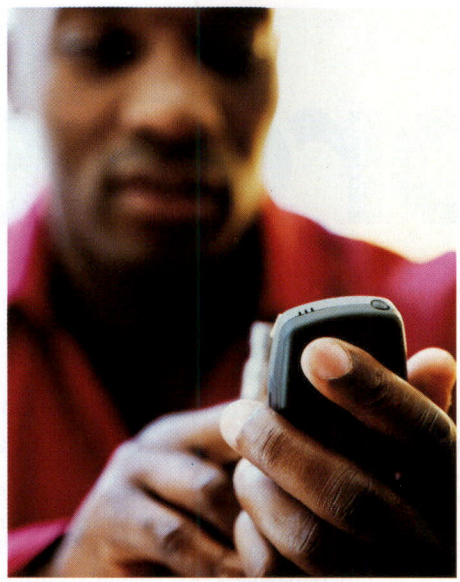
But even with an ordinary mobile, you can also keep up with your emails wherever you are, thanks to Freeserve Speechmail. Speechmail is a service which allows you to have the emails in your inbox read to you by a special electronic voice, so you never have to miss an important message.

But if you're one of the million-plus people in the UK who own a mobile Internet, or WAP, phone, you have even more options. For one thing, with a WAP phone you can write and send emails from your mobile as well as reading ones you've received. You can even join and keep in touch with Smartgroups, just as you would on your PC.

Better still, you can access selected areas of the Internet, enabling you to read online information especially adapted for WAP phones. Freeserve offers a wide range of WAP content, and as it's all available from ***wap.freeserve.com***, it's easy and quick to find whatever you're after. As well as the latest national and world news, including the latest events in sport, business and entertainment, you'll be able to get the latest sports results and the weather. You can even shop online or look for a hotel in the UK or overseas.



Your mobile can do much more than simply make calls


Use your mobile to access your emails or the Web

Freeserve also offers a search facility for WAP phones, allowing you find services and shops such as the nearest petrol station, hotel, or department store. So if you're running out of gas or need to buy a last-minute gift, you need only use your WAP phone to tell you where to go; and the Freeserve route planner will give you directions as well as costs for longer journeys by rail, air and sea. There are hours of entertainment to be had with your WAP phone, too: you can read your daily horoscope or play games.

And whether you have a WAP phone or an ordinary mobile, you can have lots of fun personalising it with a special ringtone or with a logo to replace the service provider logo which appears on your phone when it's on stand-by. By calling 0906 957 9 957 or visiting ***www.freeserve.com/mobile***, you can choose from an extensive range of tunes – from the latest pop hits to kids' TV themes – as well as quirky images to make sure that your phone stands out from the crowd. To find out more about what your mobile can do, visit ***www.freeserve.com/mobile***.

PERSONALISE YOUR MOBILE

Choose a ringtone or logo

For hundreds of great ringtones and logos just call

0906 957 9 957 or visit www.freeserve.com/mobile

Calls charged at 75p per minutes from a land line; calls from a mobile phone will be higher. Always ask the bill payer for permission to call.

NEWS IN BRIEF

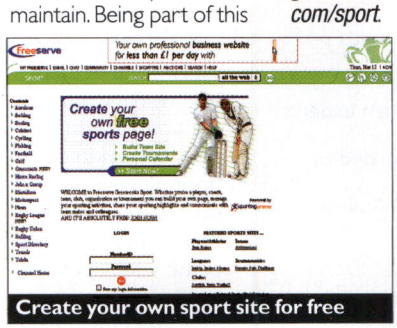
MAY 2001 BROADBAND, SPORT, INSURANCE

NO MORE LOITERING

Ever feel frustrated by the amount of time it takes for a site to download from the Internet? Well, with FreeservePlus, it doesn't have to be like that. FreeservePlus, the high-speed, broadband Web service from Freeserve. is ten times as fast as ordinary Web access, which means that sites will pop up onto your screen almost as soon as you've typed in the URL, and sound and video files will download in seconds or a few minutes when they used to take half an hour. FreeservePlus is separate to your phone line. You pay just £39.99 a month plus a one-off £150 installation fee to have it on all the time. For more information, pay a visit to ***www.freeserve.com/plus***.

SPORTING ACHIEVEMENT

Anyone involved in amateur sport will leap at the chance to use Grassroots, the new area on the Freeserve Sport channel where you can build your own sport Web site – for free! Whether you're an individual, a team or an organisation, you can use your Grassroots site to arrange fixtures, track statistics and news, plan game strategies or enjoy team photos and anecdotes. If you already have a site, it's easy to copy it over to Grassroots, where it will be much easier and cheaper to maintain. Being part of this premier online community also means that other Grassroots users will have easy access to your site, making it a great opportunity for marketing and fundraising. To get involved in Grassroots, go to ***www.freeserve.com/sport***.



Create your own sport site for free

IT'S YOUR LIFE

Freeserve has now added a life insurance to its existing policies, available on Money.

If you're worried that your family may have trouble meeting mortgage payments if you die, then a term assurance policy will make sure your home loan is paid off for them. If you want to make sure that your family is completely protected, you can take out whole-of-life assurance to make sure your loved ones also receive a regular income.

It takes just a few minutes and as little as a few pounds a month for constant peace of mind. So get covered today by visiting ***www.freeserve.com/money***.

PICTURES: IMAGE BANK, RETNA

Improve or move

Whether you want to revitalise your home, or you're moving somewhere new, the Freeserve Property channel has plenty of inspiration and advice, as its editor Sam Barrett reveals

Even if you feel like you spend most of your waking life in your workplace, you shouldn't underestimate the importance of having a comfortable and attractive home environment. In fact, if you do spend most of your day surrounded by strip lighting, grey walls, industrial carpet and rows of shabby filing cabinets, you'll definitely feel the benefit of spending your leisure time amongst colours and objects that make you feel relaxed. Whether you've just moved into a new flat or house, or you just want to brighten up your existing home, the Home Improvements section on Freeserve Property, at *www.freeserve.com/property*, has all the inspiration and advice you'll need to create a home you're really happy in.

If you don't want to make any drastic changes, the quickest and easiest method is to treat your home to some new pieces of furniture, accessories and ornaments. Our Home Improvements shopping area has a stylish range of items from Smarte to revitalise any room. For example, a contemporary coffee table can make all the difference to a tired lounge, while a decorative bowl will make an interesting feature anywhere in the home. New sofas are expensive so if you can't afford a new one, cheer up yours with an elegant throw. Many items are made by up-and-coming British designers, so you'll be getting cutting-edge design while supporting home-grown talent. If you can't decide what to buy for the room you want to refresh, there is a room-by-room index so you can quickly get plenty of ideas.

It's when you put your ideas into action that the hard work begins

Sometimes it can take more than a few pieces of furniture or a well-chosen accessory to make a difference. So if you fancy tackling something a bit more adventurous, we've plenty of ideas and advice for effective DIY. First you need to decide on the look you want. If you need a little inspiration, check out our online interiors magazine, Style Revolution, powered by HomePro. You'll find tips on how to reproduce the latest styles in your own home, as well as features on items like the best refrigerators or wood-style floor coverings, and great ideas for creating a new bathroom on a shoestring.

Of course, choosing your look is the easy bit. It's when you put your ideas into action that the hard work begins. Even if you hire someone else to do the work for you, it can be tiring just co-ordinating and monitoring its progress. But there's nothing like the satisfaction of doing it yourself, and it's always worth it to save money. Start off by using the room calculator from Smarte in our Home Improvements area. Here you can save yourself money and hassle by working out in advance how much paint, wallpaper or flooring you'll need for each room; and if you need to install radiators, it will tell you which size is best. Select the general shape of your room from the choice given, such as an L-shape or one with a bay window, then enter data such as the length, width and height of the room and the Room Calculator will tell you what you need. And if you're still thinking in imperial measurements, there's a handy converter to translate them into metric for you.

Once you've got all your materials, it's time to get stuck in. So that you don't make your DIY any harder than it needs to be, look at HomePro's Guides and Advice section for tips on how to make it as easy as possible. Have a look, too, at the DIY features in Style Revolution. The DIY and Tools section within Smarte also includes detailed instructions on DIY in the garden, from helping you choose things like the right pond, paving or decking to showing you how to install them yourself.

Great ideas for stylish new looks

But if the idea of getting paint in your hair or watching the power drill run away with you brings you out in a sweat, don't despair. The Freeserve Property channel has access to databases of accredited tradespeople to do the job for you. Whether it's putting up wallpaper in your sitting room or installing a new boiler, with

THE HOME OF YOUR DREAMS
Freeserve can make it happen

- Shop for new items to create a new look with minimum effort
- Get inspired by suggestions from our design experts
- Follow top DIY tips for results you'll be proud of
- Calculate the quantity of paint, paper and flooring you'll need so you don't run out
- Find a tradesperson you can trust
- Take the stress out of moving home

powered by freeserve
www.freeserve.com

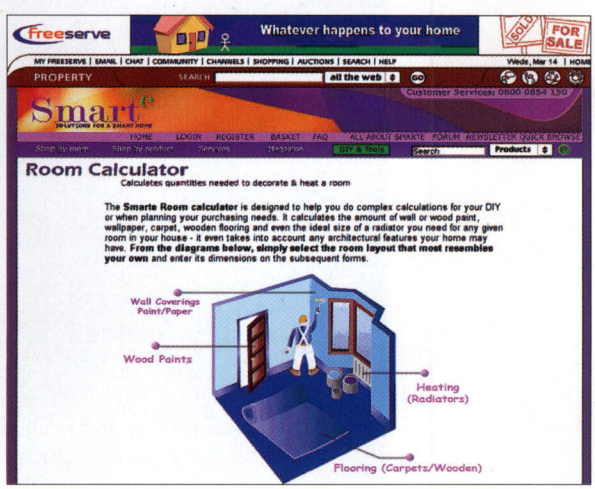
Freeserve has plenty of top tips to make your DIY go smoothly

HomePro's Find-a-Pro service you simply supply details of the task you need doing and they'll send a relevant tradesperson your details so they can get in touch to discuss the work. The search directory from Smarte in the Home Improvements section, meanwhile, helps you to find the contact details for a service provider in your area. And don't forget to look in the DIY and Tools section for explanations of building terminology and jargon. When your brickie says he's going to chuck out all the leftover muck, it's a nickname for mortar and you might be able to think of another job he can use it for. And don't worry if your plumber starts talking about the P Trap in the lavatory – it's an important part of the system!

As well as making your home life more pleasant, improving your property can make it more desirable when you come to sell it. Get advice on how to add value to your home from award-winning property writer David Spittles.

However you sell your home, you'll always need help with moving. The Freeserve Move Planner, from partner Good Migrations, is an interactive programme that will guide you through the whole moving process, from arranging your mortage to instructing solicitors and organising removals. It's a good idea to consult the Move Planner even before you've chosen your new home, as it will give you an idea of what you'll need to spend on moving – including everything from stamp duty to the cost of hiring a removals firm. The total figure might bring tears to your eyes but it's a lot easier to manage when you understand how it's broken down. And when you've chosen your new location, it will helpfully suggest you check out the area by following a link to a site which will give you the lowdown on everything from sports facilities, local schools and crime rates.

With the Room Calculator, work out what you need before you start decorating



Once you've exchanged contracts, give the Move Planner details about the location of your new home and when you plan to move in, and it will provide you with a timetable that you can keep revisiting to check and tick off tasks as you do them. As the big day approaches, it will remind you when you need to do certain tasks, sometimes also providing pieces of useful information. The Move Planner is invaluable for first-time buyers. With so much helpful advice at hand, you can enjoy your first experience of buying a home without having any of the excitement diminished by stresses and worries.

And once you've bought your new place, you can start to use all the great content in the Freeserve Property Home Improvements section to make it the home of your dreams. Find everything you'll need at *www.freeserve.com/property*.

PICTURES: KOBAL COLLECTION

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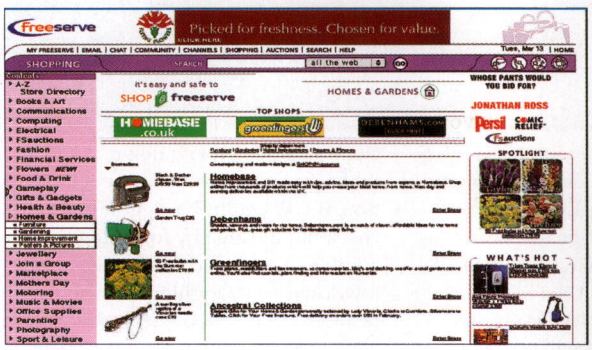
Easter inspiration

Whatever the weather this Easter, Freeserve has plenty of great ideas for your Bank Holiday weekend

This year, Easter falls on 15 April; a treat because by this time spring should have well and truly sprung. While earlier Easters still have a touch of frost about them, the warmer weather, heady scent of blossom and summery buzz of insects in mid-April will make the perfect ingredients for a relaxing Bank Holiday weekend.

If the weather stays dry, the extra day off in spring is always a great favourite with gardeners. With the warmer weather everything starts to grow vigorously again: the plants, the grass, and the weeds! Gardeners will find everything they'll need to tend their plots on the Freeserve Shopping channel (*www.freeserve.com/shopping*), from lawnmowers, spades and pruning shears to plants, bulbs and seeds to benches and gazebos. And if gardening is a new hobby, there's plenty of advice available from George, the virtual gardener within the Homes and Gardens area on the Shopping channel.

There's a gardener's paradise on Freeserve shopping



Bank Holiday Monday is also a traditional day for DIY, particularly if the weather's lousy. Make yourself useful by exploring the Home Improvements area on Freeserve Property for DIY tips, tools and inspiration to make any necessary repairs of simply give your house or flat a new lease of life.

Of course, what everyone looks forward to most at Easter is the mountain of chocolate to be consumed. These days there are so many different Easter eggs on offer in the high-street, that shopping for them can be quite exhausting. Save yourself the effort by choosing them from the delicious range available on Freeserve Shopping. Spend an hour or so drooling over the selection, then order your favorites online and have them delivered straight to your home. The virtual Easter eggs on the Freeserve Easter micro-site make a fun and tooth-friendly alternative for children. Kids can print off the eggs and colour them, then stick them up as Easter decorations. And as there are plenty of eggs to choose from, they'll be busy for hours!

When you can't stuff any more chocolate in, why not go for a refreshing walk? The cheapest option is to visit the local park, and certainly the easiest if you've got children. But if you've got a car, a trip to a nearby country park or nature reserve, armed with a frisbee and a picnic, is a great way of blowing away the winter cobwebs. And if you really want to get into the Easter spirit, take a look at the Freeserve Easter micro-site, at *www.freeserve.com/shopping/easter* and find out what special events are going on near you. There's bound to be an Easter fair, complete with egg-rolling competitions, tombolas and stands selling home-made cakes and jams – an ideal place to spend a fresh, sunny day.

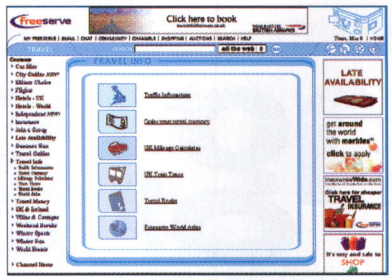
Of course, there's no reason why you have to stay local at Easter; there are plenty of days out or long weekend trips to be had all over the country. Fly to Scotland and experience the breathtaking beauty of its mountains

and lochs, or, for something more cosmopolitan, Edinburgh always has plenty to offer, from great architecture to theatre and shopping. The city of York is an ideal city to visit with children, and a romp around the city walls is guaranteed to tire them out so they sleep soundly all the way home. Every city has its galleries and museums, so even if the weather lets you down there'll be plenty to entertain you.

However you're travelling over the Bank Holiday weekend, the Travel Info section of the Freeserve Travel channel (*www.freeserve.com/travel*) has all the information you'll need to make your journey a smooth one. If you're taking the train, you can use the timetable search facility to peruse the train times before booking your tickets, and check the travel news for any information that might affect your journey. Car drivers can estimate their journey time by using the mileage calculator, and keep up to date with traffic and roadworks across the country. By planning your journey with Freeserve Travel you can arrive at your destination as fresh and excited as you were when you left home, and really make the most of your outing.

If you really want to get into the Easter spirit, visit the Freeserve Easter micro-site

Whatever the weather, make the most of the Bank Holiday



Plan your whole journey with Freeserve Travel

If you decide to go away for the whole Bank Holiday weekend, the Freeserve Travel channel will help you find the perfect hotel for your stay. The UK Hotels section includes special offers on hotels all over the country, which you can search for by region or more specifically by town or even by village. You can read detailed information about each hotel before making your choice, then check availability and make your reservation online. There are hundreds to choose from, whatever the size of your family or your budget. You can even request a hotel that has your favourite leisure pursuits on its doorstep. Find one that has a golf course nearby, or plenty of historic places to visit; a riding school or local pool will be useful if you have children to entertain; or maybe you'll just want to be sure that a choice of restaurants is only a leisurely stroll away.

As convenient as it is to stay in a hotel when you're away from home, renting a country cottage gives you even more freedom and privacy, and you can choose from hundreds of UK cottages to rent in the Villas and Cottages section of Freeserve Travel. And if you want to get even closer to the outdoors, a long weekend in spring is also a perfect opportunity to do a spot of camping. It's enough time for you to get some lungfuls of fresh air, but you'll know it's not long until you get back to creature comforts. Freeserve Shopping has a large range of outdoor clothing in the Sport and Leisure area, so there's no need to suffer too much even if the temperature drops and the clouds open.

A luxurious alternative to such clean – or not so clean – living is the proper good life, a weekend of pampering in a foreign city, with no expense spared. Take your time looking through the new City Guides section on Freeserve Travel to find your ideal destination – New York, perhaps, Paris, or Moscow – then book a package or visit the World Hotels, Flights and Insurance sections to create your own perfect break. And if you're looking after the pennies, you can still get away by snapping up one of the bargain offers always available in the Late Availability section.

Whatever you and the weather decide to do over the long Easter weekend, make the most of it by visiting *www.freeserve.com/shopping*.

HAPPY HOLIDAY
What to do this Easter

1. STUFF YOUR FACE
For maximum pleasure, order your eggs online and have them delivered

2. EASTER EGG HUNT
Make them last a little bit longer

3. GET AWAY FROM IT ALL
Make the most of the long weekend and visit Freeserve Travel

4. READ A GOOD BOOK
The Bible's an apt choice, but for something more contemporary peruse Freeserve's online selection

5. GO TO CHURCH
Touch base with the true essence and meaning of Easter

6. VISIT YOUR FAMILY
Treat them to a meal out. Check availability and book online.

7. HAVE A DINNER PARTY
Choose a scrummy recipe online and impress your friends

8. DO SOME SHOPPING
But avoid the queues, the traffic, the stress: do it all online

9. SURPRISE YOUR PARTNER
Choose a bunch of fresh spring flowers from Freeserve Shopping and have them delivered

10. GARDENING
Catch up with the weeds. From trowels to lawn mowers, it's all at Freeserve Shopping

PICTURES: PA.

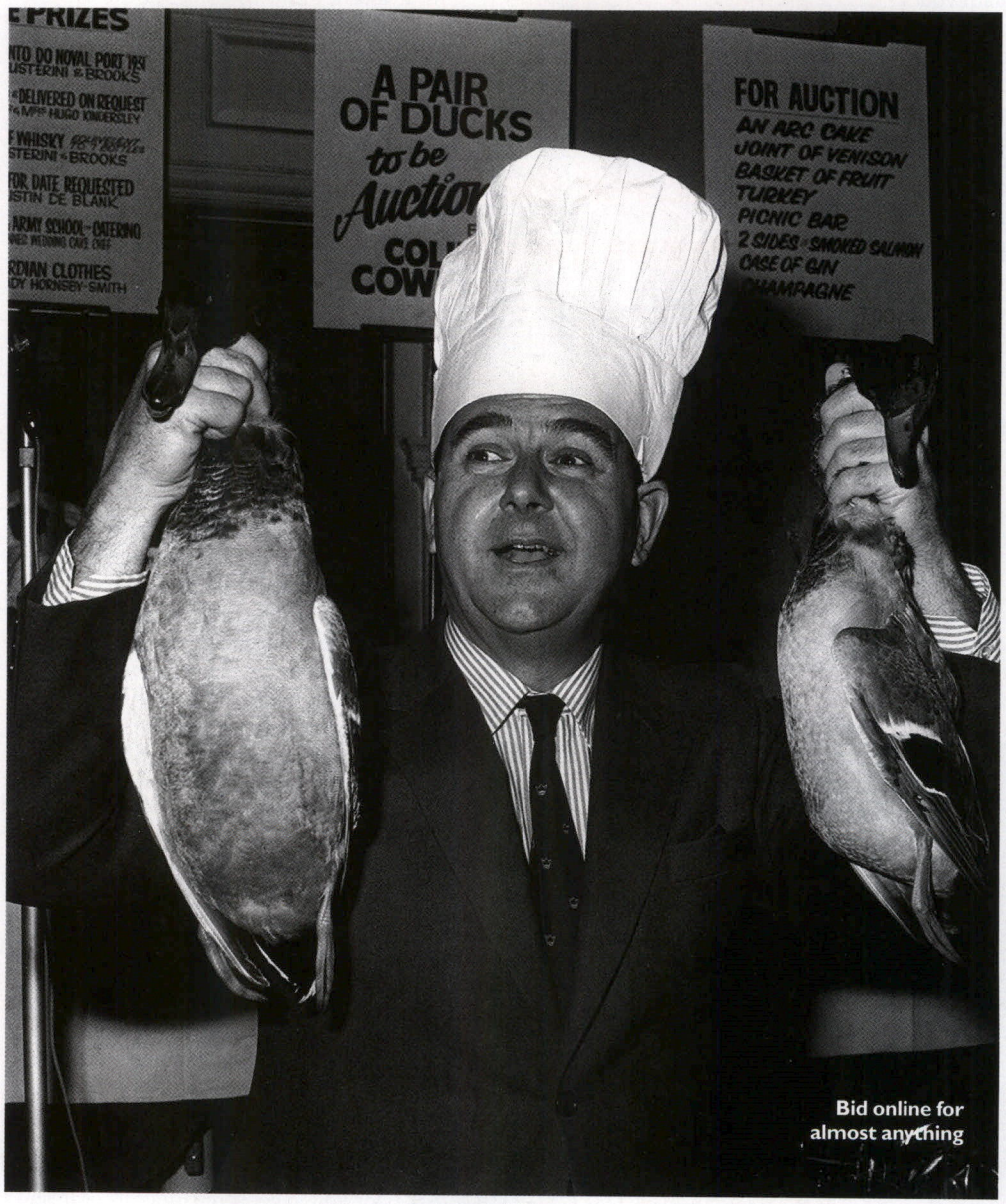
Going, gone!

Bidding online is so simple, once you try it you'll be addicted – luckily, you'll be saving money, too

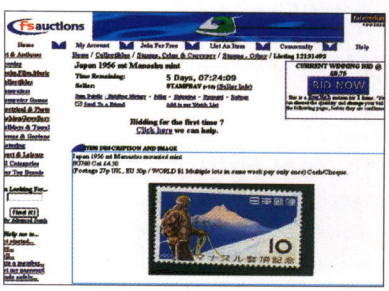
Everyone loves a bargain: paying less than the going rate for something you wanted anyway. Bidding at auction is a great way to try and get one, with the added thrill of competing against others for the same item, as you dare to pay more than them while watching your budget at the same time. Sometimes there's a reserve price, which is the lowest price the seller will accept, but provided this is fair, you'll always have a chance of getting it a really good deal; it just depends whether the next bidder wants to pay more than you do! There's nothing quite like the satisfaction of getting a beautiful old oak table for just £40 when you know it would have cost you hundreds from an antiques shop; or buying a Peugeot 306 for peanuts because no one else happened to want it the day you went to the sale.

But auctions aren't just for bargain hunters. As well as people who want to pay as little as possible for what they want, there are people who want something so much they'll pay as much as they have to so they can have it. These people are usually collectors – of art, memorabilia or other rare objects. They attend specialist auctions selling only the kind of items they collect, such as watercolours, World War II paraphernalia or antique coins. Of course they will be delighted if they get their chosen item at a lower price than they expected to pay, but for them, auctions are the only places where items they normally have to chase around the country to find separately will be gathered together for sale under one roof.

But whether you want to find a bargain or a rare item you've always wanted to own, the problem with traditional auction houses is that you usually have to be there in person to bid, and often enough that means having the time to make the journey by car or train, view the items before the auction to be sure they're what you want to bid for, and then wait for hours for your chosen item to come up in the sale. Also, some auctions take place on weekdays, so if you have a full-time job you may miss the sale altogether unless you can persuade someone else to go on your behalf.



Bid online for almost anything



Find collectibles like rare stamps as well great bargains

Which is why bidding online is such a great idea. For one thing, you don't have to travel anywhere to place your bid – you can do it all at your computer, from the comfort of your own home. And with the Freeserve Auctions channel, FSauctions (***www.fsauctions.co.uk***), you only need to visit the one site to find a whole range of different items for sale, including several categories that you wouldn't normally expect to find in an

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traditional auction house. As well as art and antiques, jewellery, books, and film and music items, there are computers, electrical and photographic equipment, and even holidays! Basically, if there's a chance someone might want to buy a certain item, it can go up for auction on FSauctions. There's a huge variety of items up for sale, new and not so new, and some very rare and old items, too. Many are used items that have been put up for auction by members of the public, but there are also many goods, such as electronic ones, that are brand new. So it's always worth checking FSauctions before you buy a new television or computer, in case you can get it cheaper by bidding for it online.

It's very easy to find what you want to bid for. You just click through from a main category, such as 'Electrical and Photo', to more specific sub-categories, such as 'Audio Equipment', to find the brand new personal stereo you're after. You'll be amazed at the savings you can make by bidding online. Some of the recent bargains on FSauctions include a new Toshiba DVD player worth £400 which recently sold at FSauctions for just £150, and a Muddy Fox mountain bike worth £2,000 which went for £690!

Bidding online is incredibly easy, and once you've tried it, you'll soon be hooked!

Bidding online is also much more relaxing than in an auction room. At most traditional auctions, you'll be in a large room full of other bidders, including your competitors. Once your item comes up for bidding, you'll all have just a few minutes to bid against each other for it, and if you hesitate to name a higher price, the item will go to the last bidder instead. It can be easy to lose your nerve as the auctioneer races through the sale, and if there are a large number of lots, or sales, to get through in one auction, his incomprehensible babble can be quite confusing. You'll need your wits about you and the confidence not to be intimidated by the secretive movements of your competitors as they try to outbid you.

Online auctions, however, usually continue over a period of hours or even days, rather than minutes, for any one item, which means you have the time to consider how high you want your bid to go, without being pressurised by the babble of the auctioneer and the presence of your competitors.

Bidding online with FSauctions is also incredibly easy – so easy, in fact, that once you've tried it, you'll soon be hooked! Once you've started, you'll want to keep popping back to FSauctions to see what goodies are to be had! And as new items are put up for auction every day, it's a good idea to check the channel regularly to make absolutely certain you don't miss out.

Register, click and name your price: bidding online is that easy

All you need to do to start bidding on FSauctions is to join up by registering a username and getting your own personal password. Joining FSauctions is free and takes just a few minutes. Then, once you've found an item you want to bid for, you simply click on the 'Bid Now' button to enter the amount you want to pay, which can be as little as £1 above the current winning bid. You can read details about the item, information about the bidding so far and how much time you have left to take part in the auction. And there's no need to hang around waiting to see if someone else tries to outbid you; if they do, FSauctions will let you know by email, inviting you to bid again. You can even use a service called 'autobidding' to bid for you if you don't want to keep checking your email; you just need to tell it your upper limit and it will take care of the rest. When you win an auction, you will automatically receive an email with the seller's contact details so that you can arrange payment and delivery of the item you've bought.

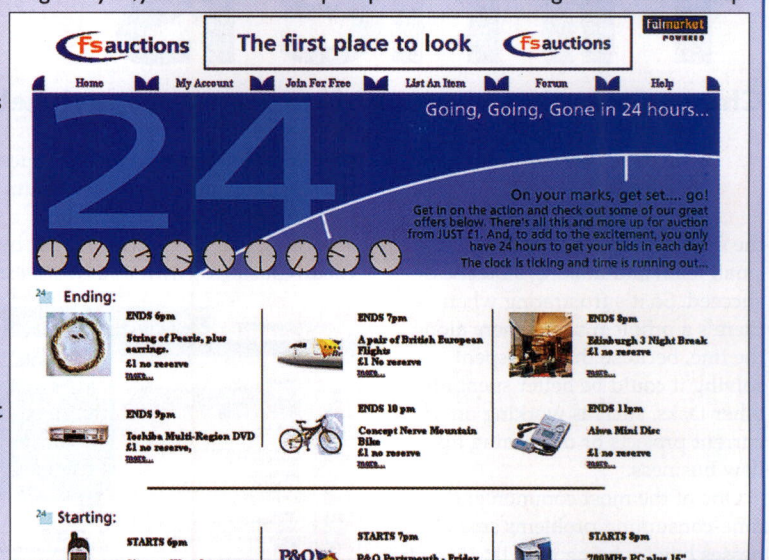
It's just as easy to sell an item on FSauctions. Once you've joined, you simply follow the step-by-step guide, entering a description of your item together with a start and end date for your auction to run. Then just sit back and watch the action! When the auction closes, you will receive an email telling you if, and to whom, your item has been sold. If you do sell your item, you'll pay a small 'success' fee to Freeserve, which you do by debit or credit card. It's a completely safe and secure way of paying, and no one else will have access to your data.

It's that easy both to buy and to sell online, but if you need any help there's plenty at hand in the Beginner's Guide, or in 'How do I bid?' and 'How do I sell?'. Try it today: go to *www.fsauctions.co.uk*, and you'll have hours of fun as well as loads of great bargains!

UNTIL 13 APRIL ONLY!

Quick-fire auctions starting at just £1

You'll always have a chance of coming away with a bargain from FSauctions. But until 13 April your chances will be even higher if you bid in the 'Gone in 24 hours' series of auctions. There's a huge range of brand new goods on offer, from mobiles phones, mini-disc players, TVs and mountains bikes to luxury cruises and weekend breaks in the UK. But, incredibly, whatever the item, the bidding starts at just £1! Each auction lasts just 24 hours, and as there's no reserve price, if no one else is quick enough to spot the item you want and bid against you, you'll be able to snap it up for next to nothing! You'll have to keep checking the channel yourself, though, to make sure you don't miss any of the bargains coming up. The bidding works in exactly the same way as a regular auction on FSauctions, so you can always leave it down to the autobidder to bid on your behalf if you can't keep checking your email throughout the day. With just one week left of this amazing series, grab the bargains while you can by going straight to *www.fsauctions.co.uk*.



PICTURES: P.A.

CHASING DEBTS

Chasing debts can waste valuable time

Time is money

Chase new business instead of late payments, with help from Clearlybusiness.com

While running a small business can be hard work, there's nothing like the satisfaction of being part of a small team and making a business succeed. So it's frustrating when there's a problem somewhere along the line, because the time spent solving it could be better spent on other tasks, such as working on current projects or drumming up new business.

One of the most common and most time-consuming problems small businesses have is being paid late for jobs they've already done. Small businesses spend an average of seven hours each month chasing large debts, according to a survey carried out by Clearlybusiness (*www.clearlybusiness.com*), the small business Web site backed by Freeserve and Barclays. That's one working day every month on the telephone or typing letters, trying to get paid for work they've already done. So not only is the business losing income because it's not getting paid, it's also losing time which could be spent on new work or finding new customers.

Save time and get someone else to chase your debts

The amount of time businesses spend chasing debts is even more surprising when you consider that legislation was recently introduced to tackle exactly this problem.

powered by freeserve www.freeserve.com

In November 2000, the Late Payment of Commercial Debts (Interest) Act 1998 was extended to give small businesses the right to claim interest from other businesses, small and large, who haven't paid up after an agreed deadline. For more details, see *www.clearlybusiness.com/finance.*

But whether or not small businesses choose to employ the new law to get the money they're owed, they can now get additional help from the Internet, enabling them to dramatically cut the time they waste chasing debts. Of course, the best way to avoid debts being owed to you in the first place is to avoid the kind of customers who create them. With Clearlybusiness you can do just that by using the credit checking facility that enables you to perform checks on over 2.5 million UK registered companies and non-limited businesses from its database of 10,000,000 documents from official sources. Once you register, you can have instant online access to the database, 24 hours a day. So whenever you're considering doing work for a new client, consider checking the database to find out whether you're going to regret it!

Even if you trust your customer to pay you once the work's done, you can always help yourself to avoid the wait by keeping a clear record of all your invoices so that you know exactly when payment is due. To make this easier, Clearybusiness now has an online diary facility to help you keep track.

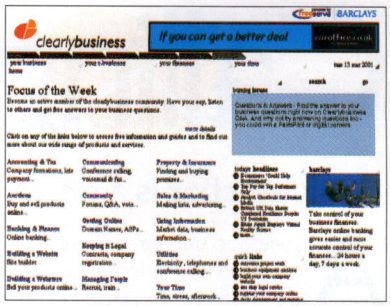
Sometimes debts can't be avoided, however hard you try. But instead of wasting precious time chasing them yourself, you can can get someone else to do it for you. Clearlybusiness can now offer this service online through its new partners Eversheds, the national law firm. The service, called Everdebt, starts at just £7.50, which covers the cost of sending a demand to the debtor. And with 44 percent of debts being recovered following a solicitor's letter, it's a small price to pay to get what you're owed, even if you're chasing a relatively small debt.

All you need to do to use the service is to complete the online registration form, and the demand will be sent out. So that you understand exactly how the recovery process works, the Briefings section gives you an explanation of every stage. You also have constant real time access to your records so you can monitor your case every step of the way.

Whether or not small businesses choose to employ the new law, they can now get extra help from the Internet

But the impact of the new law has yet to been seen. Only 15 percent of small businesses have actually tried charging interest to debtors, while the rest still rely on traditional methods of chasing late payments: 84 percent make phone calls, 63 percent write their own letters, and 23 percent use solicitors' letters.

Clearlybusiness has several ways of making debtors pay



By using Clearlybusiness to check prospective clients' credit history, keep track of the invoices you send out and have your debts chased on your behalf, you'll be able to keep your business out of the red and focus instead on creating new business and making more money. Find all of these services at *www.clearlybusiness.com/finance.*

DEALING WITH DEBT

Ten tips to keep you in the black

1. THINK about whether you need to offer credit in the first place. Cash payments will be much better for your business

2. INVESTIGATE PROSPECTIVE CUSTOMERS' credit record before you do any work for them. Look them up via Clearlybusiness and get references from other businesses who have worked with them

3. MAKE IT CLEAR on your invoices how much credit you can offer. You could offer 30, 60 or 90 days

4. CHARGE INTEREST on late payments, stating your rate of interest clearly on your invoices

5. ISSUE INVOICES PROMPTLY Issuing them late means you're giving credit when you don't have to

6. KEEP A SYSTEM such as the one offered by Clearlybusiness, which allows you to check exactly when invoices are sent out, when they're due and when they've been paid

7. DON'T HESITATE to send out reminders for payment – the longer you wait, the more your business suffers

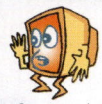
8. CONSIDER using a professional debt collecting service such as that provided by Clearlybusiness. It's cheap, effective, and shows debtors that you mean business!

9. THINK about how you're going to deal with late payers if you work with them again in the future. You could reduce the amount of credit they're allowed, cut it altogether or insist on cash-only payments in future

10. IF YOU'RE CARRYING a number of bad debts, consider using a factoring service where you effectively sell on your debt for another party to recover. You won't get the full value of the money owing to you, but it might be worth the loss to get most of it back

PICTURES: KOBAL COLLECTION

Calling all chatterboxes



Internet chat is a great way to make friends online, and so easy to use!

Anyone who uses email knows how much fun it is to send a message to a friend anywhere in the world and receive a reply in minutes. But sometimes even a few minutes can seem too long to wait. The answer is Internet Chat. Internet Chat is like email, but works in real time, allowing users to see each others' comments the second they're sent. It also offers you the opportunity to meet other people online by entering a virtual chat room, where lots of people chat together in the same place.

Most Internet Chat sites offer rooms especially for people of the same age or who share the same interest, so it's a great way for like-minded people to meet. The Freeserve Chat service is completely free and has over 20 main chat rooms to choose from, including rooms for 20-somethings, singles, teens, movie buffs and – when they can find the time – even workaholics! There's also the Lobby, where you can hang out if you can't make up your mind where to go first.

With Freeserve Chat, on the Freeserve Today page at ***www.freeserve.com***, it takes just a few minutes to get nattering. If you've never used Chat before, you'll be guided through a quick registration process where you'll need to choose a nickname. This will appear before any comments you type when you chat so that others can recognise you. Then you'll be asked to give Freeserve Chat your email address so that your unique password can be sent to you. Now it's time to get out there and start meeting other Chat members!

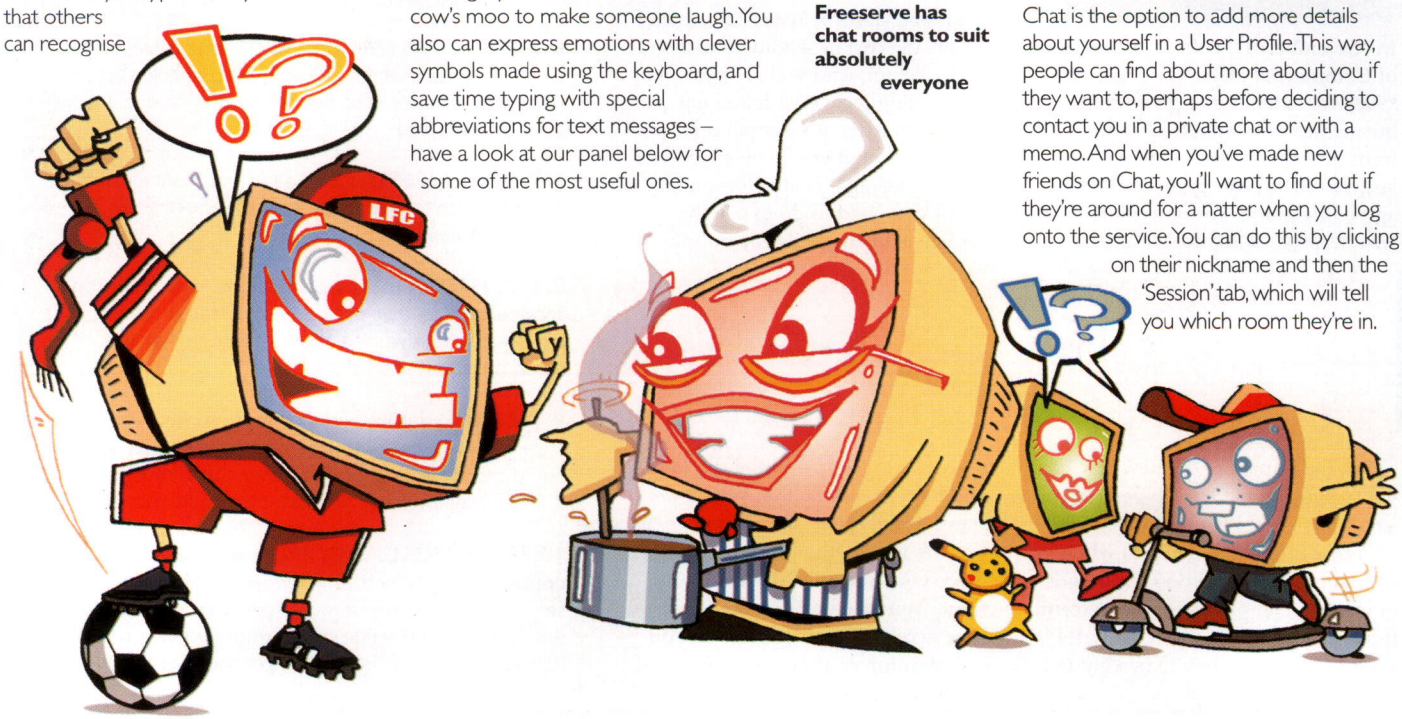
Using Chat is easy. Once you've chosen the chat room you'd like to enter, you'll be able to watch the conversation taking place on the main display window. To join in, simply type your own comment into the message area and click on 'Send' for everyone else to see it. Sometimes it can be a bit difficult to express yourself properly just by typing, so try adding one of the emotion pictures or a funny sound to get a bit more across. You can add a happy or sad face, for example, or send your comment accompanied by a funny noise: applause, perhaps, when you like someone's joke; or the sound of a toilet flushing if you think it's rubbish. Send a cow's moo to make someone laugh. You also can express emotions with clever symbols made using the keyboard, and save time typing with special abbreviations for text messages – have a look at our panel below for some of the most useful ones.

If you fancy a change of scene, it takes just a few clicks of your mouse to enter another chat room. Simply click on the 'Rooms' tab on the top of the screen to view the entire list of rooms and the number of members in each one. Double click on the one you want, and you're in the door!

Being in a chat room with other people is like being at an online party, with everyone joining in the conversation at the same time. It's great fun, but when there are lots of people chatting, it can be hard to make your voice stand out from the crowd. Raise your voice by using the tools at the bottom of the screen to change the colour of your type or the background it appears on to make everyone notice you!

And like a party, you can whisper to another chatterer, or start a one-to-one conversation. It's easy to do this. Simply find their nickname on the list of Chat members in your current room, then click on it to get a private window which only they'll see. Alternatively, by clicking on the third icon from the right in the tool bar, you can just send them a private note to read at their leisure. And if you need to check what any of other icons do, just click on the question mark in the top right of the window to get some quick help.

One of the new features on Freeserve Chat is the option to add more details about yourself in a User Profile. This way, people can find about more about you if they want to, perhaps before deciding to contact you in a private chat or with a memo. And when you've made new friends on Chat, you'll want to find out if they're around for a natter when you log onto the service. You can do this by clicking on their nickname and then the 'Session' tab, which will tell you which room they're in.



Freeserve has chat rooms to suit absolutely everyone

powered by freeserve www.freeserve.com

Of course, for Chat to be fun, everyone should be allowed freedom of speech. But sometimes it's inappropriate to say anything you want to in a public place, so Freeserve has a growing team of moderators to keep an eye on things like bad language and offensive comments. This is particularly important to protect young people who might be exploring Chat. In some rooms there's also a special filter to make sure that bad language doesn't get through. If chatters continue to offend, moderators can bar them from the chat room altogether. And if you find that you repeatedly don't like someone's comments, or they keep hassling you, you can choose to bar them from your message window by clicking on the 'Ignore' icon, second from right on the Chat tool bar. You can always let them back in again if you change your mind, by clicking on the icon again. Some rooms, such as the teen room, are 'ring fenced', so that they are kept exclusive to the members that use them. Another ring-fenced room is the unmoderated Adult Chat room, a new addition to Chat that enables parents to use browser security control to block access by children. The teens room is also preceded by Internet safety guidance for parents and children, supplied by children's charity NCH.

Once you've got the hang of Chat, you'll be able to enjoy the regular live celebrity chats, too – don't miss fashion designer Jeff Banks on April 12th, or *The Young Ones* star Nigel Planer on April 26th.

With a room for everyone on Chat, you're guaranteed to get nattering, and you'll quickly make lots of new friends, whatever your age or interests. Get started straight away, by going to Chat on Freeserve Today, at *www.freeserve.com*.

EXPRESS YOURSELF

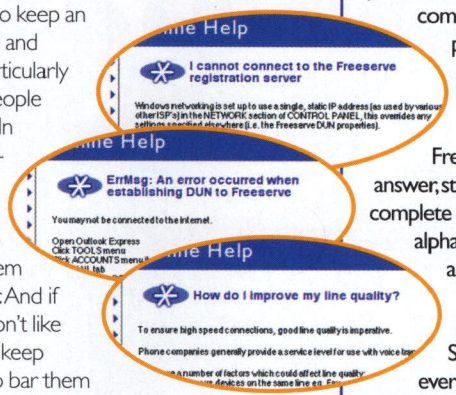
Useful short cuts

:-)	Happiness, or a joke
;-)	A wink
:-(	Sadness
:-o	Shock
:*	A kiss
:-p	Sticking your tongue out
0:-)	An angel
n e 1	'anyone'
LOL	'lots of laughs'
M8	'mate'

www.freeserve.com/help

ONLINE HELP

We've put together an awesome set of answers for all the technical queries that you might have. It's available on our Web site – and it's free!

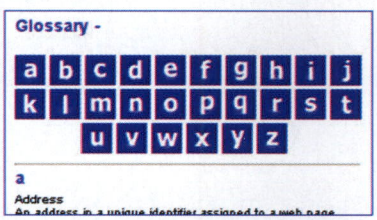


WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS?

If you're new to the Internet, Freeserve is committed to making it as easy as possible for you to get online. We've designed the help section on the Freeserve Web site so you can turn to Freeserve and get a straight answer, straight away. There's a complete content guide, a full alphabetical index of topics and a Find function – all designed to take you straight to the answer you need. Separate sections deal with everything you need to know to avoid problems before set-up, and tell you what to expect as you begin to install the software from the CD-ROM onto your machine. It really is that simple!

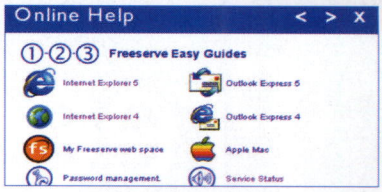
HOW DOES ONLINE HELP WORK?

It's easy! There are four main sources of information. Read through the descriptions below and you'll soon see which best suits the type of query you have. Then connect to Freeserve, visit the help section and get all your questions answered quickly.



THE GLOSSARY

If there's an Internet expression you don't understand, turn to our glossary first. It's more than likely to be there.



THE EASY GUIDES

If there's an area of your Net use that is causing you difficulty, turn to our Easy Guides for a complete solution. You'll find answers sorted by subject.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

If there's a specific question you need answered, turn to our Q&A section for rapid help. First select the general area from our drop-down menu, then a specific question. You may find your question has already been answered.

CONTACTS

If you still need help, you can email our support staff. They're the same people who staff our phone helpdesks, and they're trained to deal with your queries. Direct email addresses are listed on the contacts page. They'll be happy to help you!

HOW DO I FIND ANSWERS ON THE CD?

Alternatively, there's also a fully comprehensive Help feature on the Freeserve start-up CD-ROM. When you put the CD in your machine you'll be given four options. The Help feature takes you to a comprehensive set of instructions to enable you to get online with Freeserve. *www.freeserve.com/search.*

PHONELINE HELP

Our experts are on call 24 hours a day

Using the Freeserve online help service couldn't be simpler, but from time to time you might have a direct question for one of our experts. To help you get the most out of your connection, the Freeserve Technical Support team is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Make sure you've consulted our online help before you call, as you may find we've already answered your question. If not, our trained staff can provide you with instant answers in plain English on a range of Internet subjects. Calls cost 50p per minute.

PC Support 0906 2517517; Apple Mac 0906 7234000

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PICTURES: STUART HARRISON

surf the Internet without watching the clock

Freeserve AnyTime just £12.99 per month

Freeserve leads the way in making the Internet an easier, freer place. And we're doing it again with Freeserve AnyTime.

From January, Freeserve AnyTime gives you Internet calls, anytime, day or night, for an incredible £12.99 per month. Freeserve AnyTime provides all the benefits of Freeserve's fun-packed, easy-to-use, free service without the worry of spiralling telephone bills. No one else can match it.

So if you're a regular Internet user, register for Freeserve AnyTime right now, at www.freeserve.com/time

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THE UK's No. 1 FOR THE INTERNET

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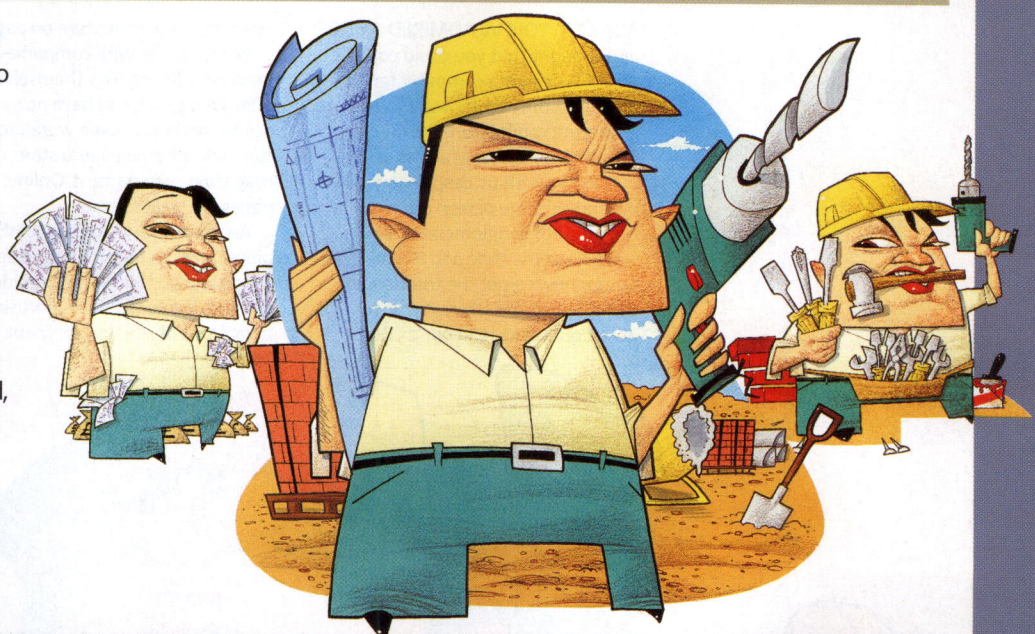
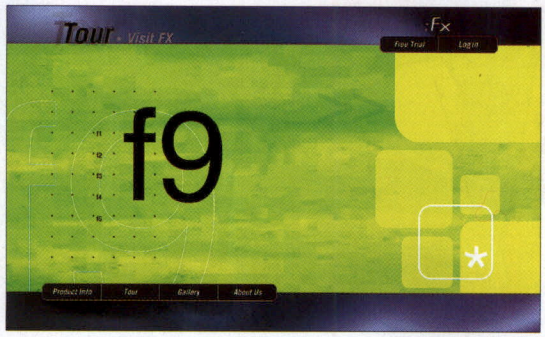


SITE BUILDING **50 TOP TIPS** Making dot com construction a doddle



WEB DESIGN Try your hand at something Flash

eBOOKS Read all about it...

THE SITE BUILDER'S HANDBOOK

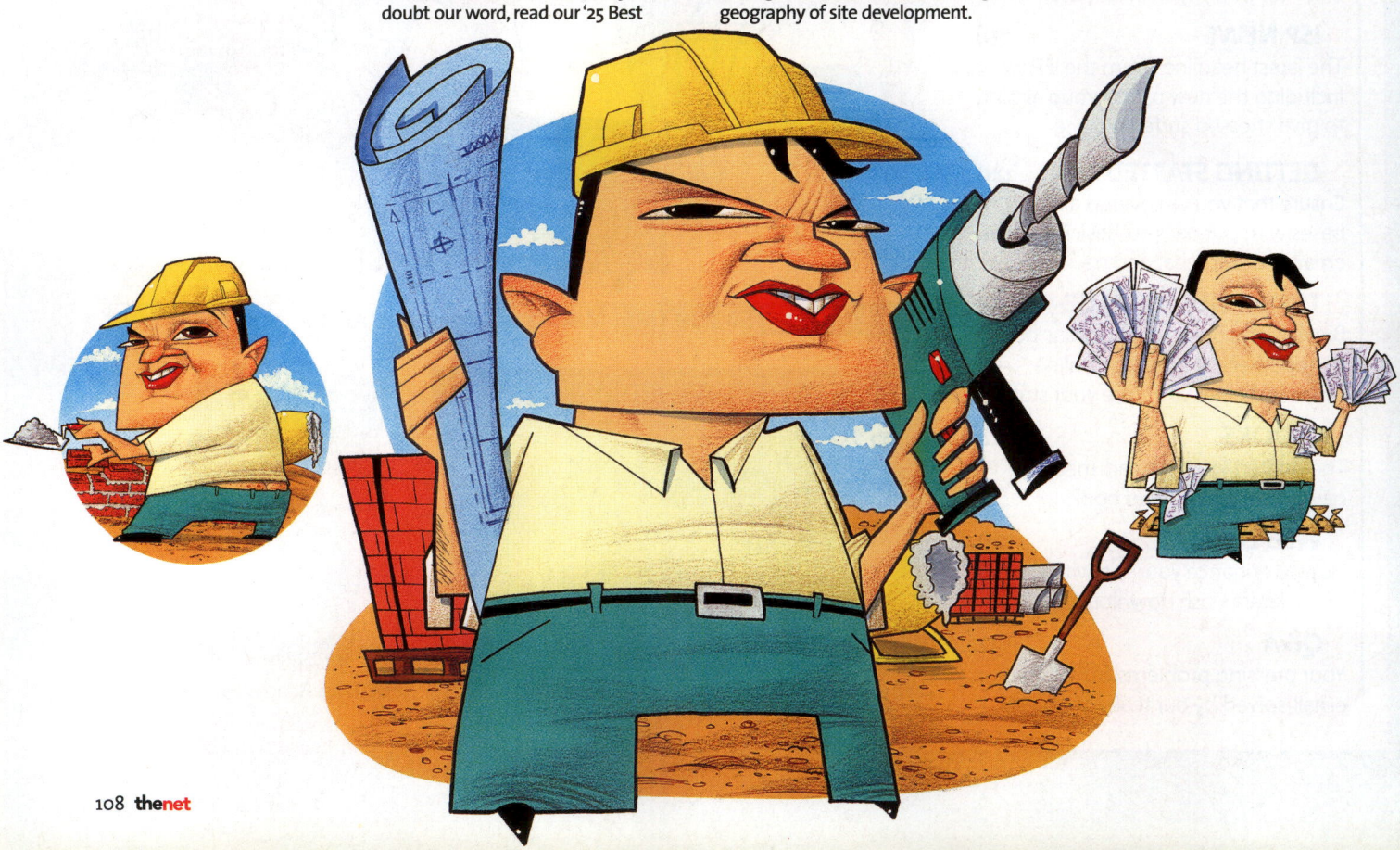
50 tips for the aspiring site constructor

ADMIT IT: YOU'VE ADMIRED A SITE and thought that you could equal it. All you'd need is a computer (got it), time (I'll work nights) and £50 million in venture capital from the City (cue tumbleweed blowing across set)...

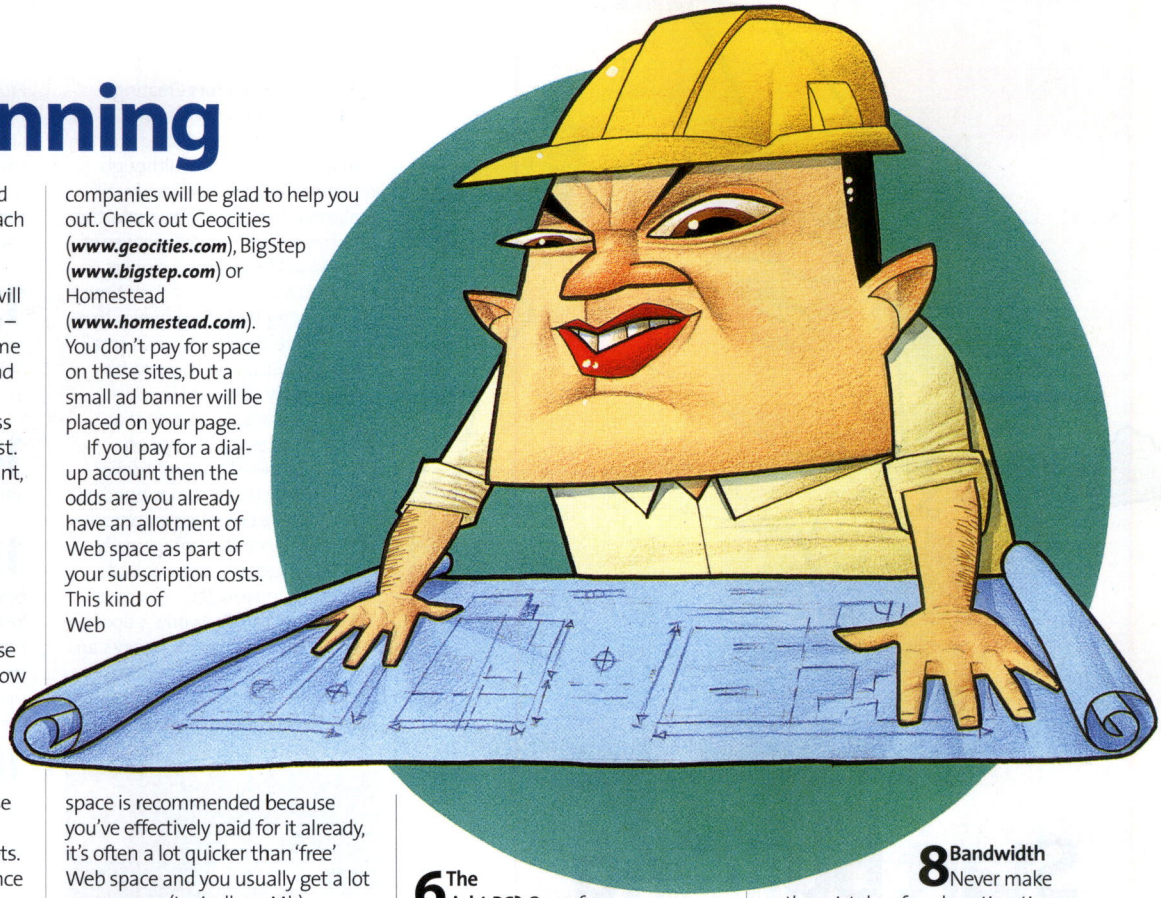
But stay with us, despondent soul: on the Web, one person can rival the mightiest of conglomerates. Yes, you'll need the time and the hardware, but for now forget the truckload of cash (that comes later). And if you doubt our word, read our '25 Best Homemade Sites' feature on page 32.

What's more, with companies practically falling over themselves to offer Web space, you have no excuse not to create your own world. You can build a home page, a store, a magazine...you name it. Online, all pages are created equal.

And here's your starting point. From preparation through to future developments, our 50 tips will help guide you through the sometimes confusing geography of site development.



Get planning



1 Target audience It might sound obvious, but your entire approach to building your Web site will depend on its function. A professional or e-commerce site will require quite a different approach – and level of investment – to a home page about yourself for friends and family to check out

If you are out to build a business site, research your online niche first. Just because you think it's a brilliant, innovative idea doesn't mean somebody else didn't think the same thing a year ago.

2 Logistics Next, you need to identify the size and location of your potential audience, because this, too, has a direct bearing on how you eventually design your site. For instance, if you want to reach the widest possible audience, you'll have to design relatively basic Web pages because older browsers don't support features like Cascading Style Sheets. The location of your target audience

Homestead: free Web space

will also have a bearing on where you get your site hosted: if you're aiming mainly at the Americans, get the site hosted there and download speeds will be all the better. And of course, don't forget your audience's sensibilities – are they more likely to appreciate a mainly text-based site?

3 Web space This is where you will store your site and it comes in two main varieties: the type you pay for outright and the type you still pay for, albeit indirectly.

For example, if you want to create a personal home page, any of the ad-sponsored 'free' Web space companies will be glad to help you out. Check out Geocities (***www.geocities.com***), BigStep (***www.bigstep.com***) or Homestead (***www.homestead.com***). You don't pay for space on these sites, but a small ad banner will be placed on your page.

If you pay for a dial-up account then the odds are you already have an allotment of Web space as part of your subscription costs. This kind of Web space is recommended because you've effectively paid for it already, it's often a lot quicker than 'free' Web space and you usually get a lot more space (typically 50Mb).

The last option is to have your Web site hosted: this is the best bet if you're building a business site that you hope will attract a high volume of visitors. The cost will depend on the amount of bandwidth you require. Shop around and compare your options with the likes of NetBenefits (***www.netbenefit.co.uk***) and VirginBiz (***www.virginbiz.net***).

VirginBiz: Web-hosting for pro sites

4 Software Building and maintaining a Web site requires software and the kind you use depends on how serious you are about your site. Most home users find that the wide range of share-ware applications on offer serve their purposes admirably. Before you begin building, make sure you have all the tools to hand.

At the very least, you will need an HTML editor, an FTP editor and a graphics application. Some programs, such as CoffeeCup, combine all these features in one suite, but we recommend using specialist applications wherever possible.

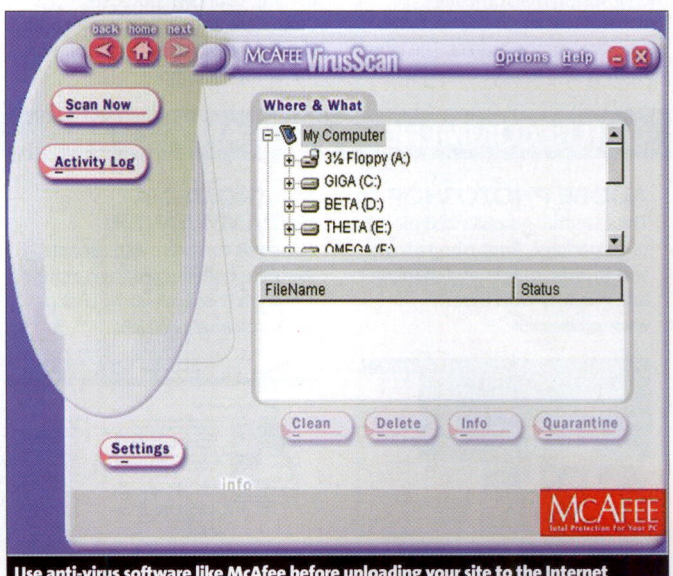
5 Back-up Before you start building your site, spare a moment to think how you'd feel if you spent a long time creating your site only to lose it: for instance, if the company hosting it went bust. We're not trying to worry you here, it's just that by and large Web sites are quite small and will easily fit on a Zip disk or CD-R, so investigate ways to back-up your site before you begin.

6 The right PC? One of the beauties of Web site design is that,unless you're creating a very graphics-intensive site, you don't need a powerful PC. In fact, just about any PC on the planet can be used as a Web design tool.

7 Virus hunt If you plan to include downloads of any sort (graphics, zip files, etc) then check your hard drive rigorously for viruses prior to uploading your site, unless you actually want to lose friends and business contacts. We recommend either Sophos AntiVirus suite or McAfee VirusShield.

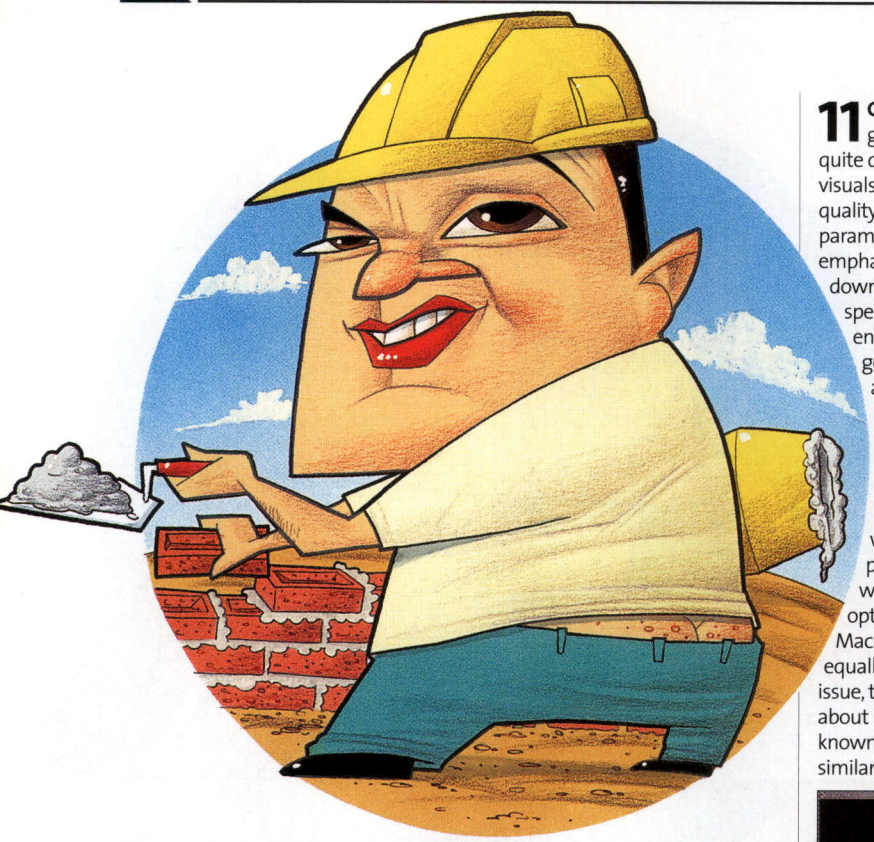
8 Bandwidth Never make the mistake of underestimating how poor some people's Internet connections are. Sure, it's great to have large graphics and multimedia on your site, but have a little consideration for those contending with old 33k modems.

9 Promotion Closed shop or open showcase? Consider how you're going to spread the word out about your site. Just because a search engine offers free space doesn't necessarily mean it's the best way to let the world know about your site. We'll discuss this in greater detail later (Tips 21-28).



Use anti-virus software like McAfee before uploading your site to the Internet

ILLUSTRATIONS: KEVIN FEBRUARY



Start building

10 HTML editors Way back in the early days of the Web, all pages were hand-coded line by line in a text editor. That wasn't a huge problem at the time because most pages were simple lumps of text, but as the Web has developed, browsers have become more advanced and connections improved, so the programming languages (HTML, XML, JavaScript) become more complex. The bottom line is that you'll need a specialised programming application.

If you've got the money (£269), then invest in Macromedia Dreamweaver, by far the best Web design tool on the market. The latest version (4.0) is almost the perfect Web design tool, combining an easily-grasped interface with enough features to satisfy your own growing coding capabilities. If you're unsure about using this sort of application then download the 30-day demo (***www.download.com***) and see how you get on with it.

Alternatives to Dreamweaver include Frontpage 2000, CuteHTML and CoffeeCup. If you have Microsoft Office, you probably already own Frontpage. Its principle advantage is that it includes a variety of design templates that are simple to modify to meet your own purposes. CuteHTML and CoffeeCup are both Shareware programs and therefore the cheapest options.

11 Graphics editors Creating graphics for the Internet is quite different to producing ordinary visuals for print media, although quality of images is obviously still paramount. In the online arena, the emphasis is on file size (because of download time) and designers spend a great deal of their time ensuring that the graphics that go into their sites are as small as possible. To this end, it's highly advisable to use a graphics application that enables you to produce optimised images. Adobe Photoshop 6 comes bundled with its own Web graphics program called Imageready 3, which does a superb job of optimising images.

Macromedia's Fireworks 4 does an equally good job but, if money's an issue, try Paintshop Pro 7, which is about half the price of the better-known applications and does a similar job.

Paintshop Pro 7: affordable

12 Interactivity In the dark ages of the Internet, Web pages were static lumps of anonymous-looking text. These days, however, designers work hard to bring a level of interactivity to their pages. The easiest way of doing this is to use something called a mouseover. These are special graphics that change state when you waft the mouse pointer over them.

Mouseovers are simplicity itself to create if you're using a good Web design package like Dreamweaver or Frontpage. All you have to do is make two graphics, one for the standard 'up' state and one for the mouseover 'down' state. Once you've got to grips with mouseovers, you can try variations on the same theme, such as mouse clicks.

13 Frames These are a superb means to building a workable design on your site, but note that only Netscape 3+, Internet Explorer 3+ and Opera 3+ support them.

14 Navigation Keep it clean, keep it simple and include a text alternative to graphics if possible.

15 Tables They're very useful for restraining text within a set portion of the browser, but tables look singularly ugly if you keep the borders turned on. To make a table, create it with 1x1 dimensions and simply paste your text in.

16 Content Be aware that humour doesn't always travel well and that in-jokes have an expiry date. Consider your use of language carefully and, unless it's relevant to your site, avoid referring to people who are only famous in the UK. Don't be assumptive.

17 Optimisation Some Web design programs add useless comments to the code behind a Web page. They add up to wasted bandwidth (it all has to be down-loaded, after all) so strip them out before sending your page live.

18 Templates To save time, create a basic page template with your default fonts, colours and link settings.

19 Animation Don't overdo it. The occasional animated GIF is a nice way to spice up a page, but it's easy to go over the top, creating a fussy and slow-loading page.

OUR RECOMMENDED SITES AND SOFTWARE

ADOBE PHOTOSHOP

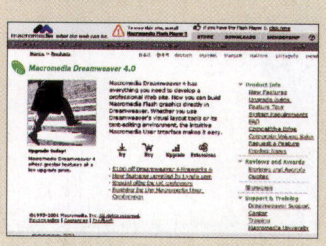
The essential graphics and pictures package, Photoshop allows you to alter images and manipulate graphics with ease

www.adobe.com

MACROMEDIA DREAMWEAVER

The most complete and useable Web site building program around – though it doesn't come cheap

www.dreamweaver.com



SUBMITWOLF PRO

Take the hard work out of getting your site noticed by automatically submitting to all the major search engines with SubmitWolf

www.xenophobia.com

ACTINIC

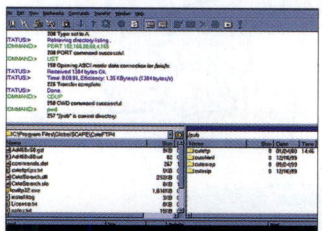
An all-in-one e-commerce package which lets you control every aspect of your site's shop facilities, from payment to delivery

www.actinic.co.uk

Daily upkeep

20 Getting it online Once you've created your page, you need to transfer it to your server. If you're using an application like Dreamweaver 4, the good news is that there's an FTP (File Transfer Protocol) program built in which will zap all your Web pages and graphics to the remote server.

If you're using another Web design tool, such as HotDog Pro, then you'll need a standalone FTP program. There are loads out there, but the two that have proved most reliable over the years are Ws_FTP Pro and CuteFTP. To use either of these programs all you have to do is enter the IP address of your remote server and the password you have set up to access the space. Then it's simply a case of transferring the files from one to t'other.

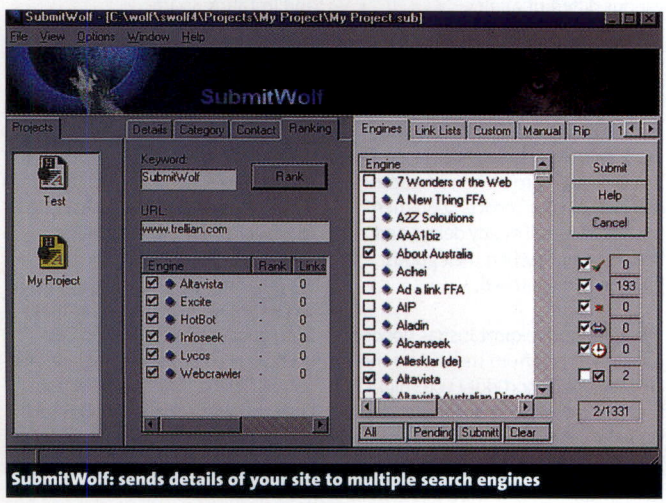


FTP moves your page to your server

Some people find they have broken links once they've sent their Web site live. This is usually due to the use of static rather than relative links. Check your pages and make sure that none of the links to your graphics or other pages take the form 'c:\my web sites\my web\graphics'. Instead they should read '\my web\graphics'.

21 Search engine submission software So your site's sat on the server and now you'd like to get some traffic pointed towards it. The best way to do this is to get yourself listed with search engines so that anyone looking for your particular topic will find a link to your site. Unfortunately, there are hundreds of search engines and the actual submission process is often tedious and lengthy.

Fortunately, there are several excellent search engine submission programs around; you just enter your details once and the program submits them to all the search sites. Head over to ***www.Xenophobia.com*** and try SubmitWolf Pro, Dynamic Submission and AddWeb Pro.



SubmitWolf: sends details of your site to multiple search engines

22 Live links? While you probably made sure all your links worked before you sent your site live, they might not be working a week later. The Web changes on a minute-by-minute basis, and sites come and go and files move around. So do yourself and your audience a favour by regularly making sure that all your links still work. If you've got Dreamweaver or Frontpage, these will scan your page for broken links, but even these programs aren't infallible. One of the best ways of tracking down broken links is to ask your readers to email you when they spot one, something along the lines of 'Broken link? Email me and I'll fix it'.

23 Mailing lists Ask visitors to your site to enter a valid email address so you can notify them of changes to your site. This is especially useful on sites that don't change particularly often.

24 Newsgroups One of the best ways to get your site known is the occasional discreet posting in a Usenet newsgroup. Don't post an identical message in all 70,000 newsgroups, but do target precisely.

25 Update your content The average Internet user is a very fickle beast; if they come back to your site and nothing's changed then the odds are they won't return a third time. So update regularly, even if it's just a small change, as it will keep your audience happy and make your site look alive.

26 Get listed The more sites that link to you, the more relevance and therefore importance you'll have in some search engines. So send emails out to friendly Web masters and ask if they'll put a link to your site on their pages.

27 Keep your old graphics It's much easier to tweak a design if you have the original image in its native layered format. So don't throw anything away!

28 Banner ads Not only are these a way of generating revenue, but you can create your own banner ad and submit it to free ad services to get your site noticed.

29 Statistics Make sure you're giving the readers what they want by analysing your Web site's statistics. This is easy if you use a program like Traffic Analyzer (***www.trafficanalyzer.net***) or a free Web-based stats site such as Web Counter (***www.thecounter.com***).

Open a shop

30 Software- or Web-based? The perception is that you need to spend thousands of pounds to make your site e-commerce capable. And while there are some extremely pricey options, you can create a full blown e-commerce site for surprisingly little outlay. What you have to consider is whether you want a box-based e-commerce solution for your site, or a server-based 'off the peg' solution.

As it happens, there is only one software package we would recommend you use. Actinic (***www.actinic.co.uk***) comes in three flavours (the basic one's £349) and lets you control every aspect of your site's e-commerce features on your own PC. It includes 128-bit security,

Actinic: e-commerce software

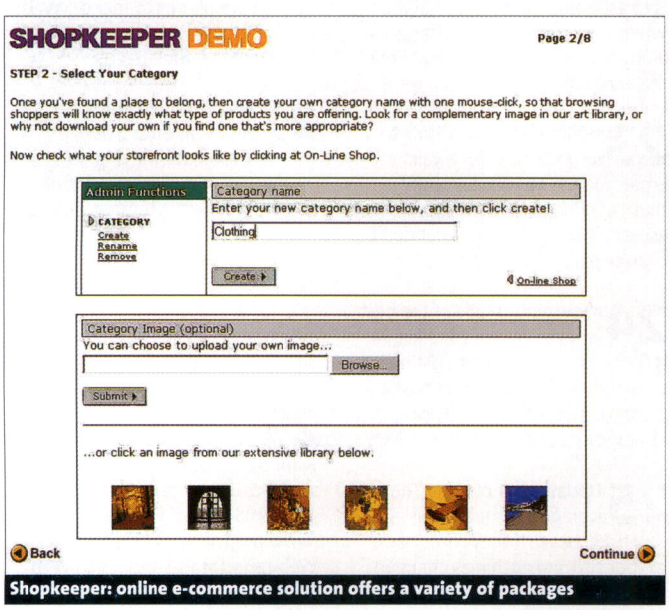
integrated bank-approved security, credit card processing and total control over the look and feel of the e-commerce pages.

Web-based solutions, like Shopkeeper.com, offer one main advantage: ease of use. Or, if you sign up with an ISP like Plus.net, it throws in a full e-commerce shop with your dial-up account. To create an online shop, all you have to do is answer a series of questions, choose a template for the site and enter your stock details. The downside is that you don't have nearly as much control over the overall look of the shop.

31 Credit card payments The simplest way to add a credit card facility to your online shop is to include your phone number on the site and ask customers to phone their orders in. Not exactly hi-tech, but a surprisingly popular solution. The other way is to sign up with an online credit card verification company.

There are quite a few of these companies, but we recommend Web Merchant, which offers credit card services starting at £125 a year. One of the major advantages of using Web Merchant is that you don't have to wait to get a Merchant ID from credit companies because they can arrange it all through their own ID.

32 Secure sites Getting your shop hosted on secure Web space will cost you a little bit more, but the issue is whether or not you want your customers to feel at ease. If they can cast their eyes down and see that little padlock at the bottom of their Web browser and know you're using site encryption, then they're far more likely to reach for their credit cards. However, security goes way beyond merely getting your online shop hosted on secure Web space. Make an effort to keep all your customer details off-server; you can collate them there, but a big list of credit card numbers is a serious and very lucrative catch for any inquisitive hackers.



Shopkeeper: online e-commerce solution offers a variety of packages

33 Visibility Your customers won't be able to pick your product off a shelf and hold it up to the light, so make sure there are plenty of high quality graphics on your site. If possible, try to include images showing the products from various different angles.

34 Delivery The advantage of building a shop on the Internet is that you get near-instant feedback on sales. Customers will expect similarly speedy delivery times, so do try to be honest about this area of your service. Keep them posted via email of any delays and let them know when their goods have been dispatched.

35 Import/export Just as goods shipped from the USA to the UK incur an import duty, you might find that goods you ship abroad are similarly liable. Make sure you investigate this thoroughly before promising overseas sales.

36 Pricing There is a general assumption among the shopping public that everything's cheaper on the Internet. If you're offering products that are available on the high street, you will have to at least match their prices and/or come up with a very good reason why anyone should buy from you, rather than a shop.

37 Follow-up Make sure to keep your customers informed about your latest range of products, but don't overdo it. A simple email every couple of weeks should be well received, but it's a very thin divide between discreet marketing and irritating spam.

38 Digital money Touted in the late 1980s as the next big thing, digital money turned into a white elephant, mainly because debit cards are effectively the same thing. It's not worth investigating digital money systems; just set up credit card commerce facilities.

39 Integrity If somebody's good enough to buy something from your online shop, then the least you can do is keep their details secure. Sell on that customer database and you will alienate the very people who are your livelihood, plus you may be in violation of the Data Protection Act.

The next step...

40 Flash When it was first released about three years ago, everyone thought Macromedia Flash would be just another browser plug-in. Since then, however, it has developed into a language so advanced that it will soon rival HTML in popularity. Whole Web sites are now being designed in Flash, bringing a much-needed change to the world of Web design.

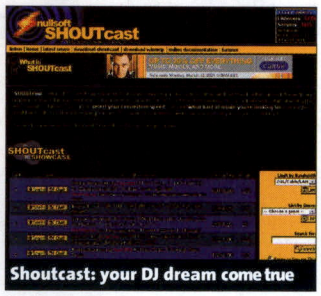
People like to incorporate Flash elements into their sites for many reasons, but it's nearly always a next step. Flash is a combination of smoothly-moving vector animations and snazzy text effects. For a generation brought up on television it brings a much cooler look to Web pages and enables designers to introduce the sort of animation that would have previously used vast amounts of bandwidth.

The snag with Flash is that it's a tricky language to learn, particularly in its latest (fifth) incarnation. Fortunately, numerous easy-to-use Flash applets have appeared on the market – Flax, Swish, Koolmoves and SWfx, to name but four – which enable the beginner to produce slick text and graphic-based Flash animation. You should find they're well worth checking out.

Flash: cool, but tricky to learn

41 Streaming audio/video There's little doubt that streaming audio and video over the Internet has had a huge impact on the reach of TV and radio stations. What you might not have realised is that it's feasible for mere mortals to add streaming media to their Web sites. There are a couple of ways to go about this, but the easiest is to download Real Producer, convert your media into the Real Audio (***www.realaudio.com***) format (.RAM) and then simply upload the file to your server.

If you've always fancied being top DJ on your own radio station, then check out what Shoutcast has to offer (***www.shoutcast.com***). Alternatively, Apple's Quicktime (***www.apple.com***) is an acceptable alternative to



Shoutcast: your DJ dream come true

Real Audio as it supports both standalone audio/video files and streaming media.

42 Bulletin Boards One of the most effective ways to build a community around your Web site is to add some sort of forum. As with all things on the Internet there are two ways to go about this: pay for it up front (with something like Ultimate Bulletin Board) or use a Web-based service such as EZBoard (***www.ezboard.com***).

As far as the end user's concerned there isn't a huge difference between a bulletin board that's housed on your own server and one that's managed by EZboard, apart from a discreet advert. We reckon your best bet is to use EZboard for the simple reason that it's far easier to manage.

43 Redesigns Just because you laboured long and hard over your site's original look and feel doesn't mean you should leave it that way to all eternity. If at all possible, try to refresh the design every six months; keep the punters coming back to see what's new.

44 WAP Call it a poor substitute for the real Web if you will, but you can pull in considerable audience numbers if you create a WAP version of your site.

45 VRML When this Internet language (Virtual Reality Markup Language) first appeared, it was way ahead of its time and it's only now that it's coming into its own. Probably not the Next Big Thing, but an interesting feature on any Web site (see ***www.vrmlsite.com***).

46 Chat You can add real-time chat to any site;imagine how useful this would be on a shop site. Check out ChatPlanet (***www.chat-planet.com***) to get an idea of the possibilities.

47 Database design Once your site's been live for a while, you'll soon find manually editing HTML pages to be a drain on your time. Once they become unwieldy, many sites move over to a database-based design so updates can be made by non-technical personnel.

48 Your own server If you have the bandwidth (via an ADSL, cable or leased line connection) and a static IP address (ask your provider if you're unsure) then you could quite feasibly host your Web site on your own computer, giving you complete and instant control over its behaviour.

49 Off-Web design If you find you've got a popular site on your hands, consider spinning it off-Web. Many sites sell T-shirts, mouse mats, etc, and find they're a handy way of generating some welcome hard cash. Other sites make the jump from Web to print, Games Domain (***www.gamesdomain.com***) being a case in hand.

50 The next Net Now that you're enjoying the benefits of an online presence, be aware that it's an amorphous entity, constantly changing and evolving. Don't get caught out of the loop next time; keep abreast of developments if you want to lead the pack, not follow it. Naturally, we recommend a regular intake of *the net*... see subscription offer, page 30.

Our top 50 ISPs

May 2001 We tested over 200 UK ISPs to bring you the cream of the crop

ISP NAME	WEB ADDRESS	DESCRIPTION	PHONE	EMAIL ADDRESSES
NO MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION You pay as you go, making these perfect for evenings and weekends				
Free Online	www.free-online.net	Straightforward free ISP offering news and email	0870 7060504	5
Sniff Out	www.sniffout.net	Free ISP with a range of features, content and technical support options	01883 742510	Unlimited
The X-Stream Network	www.x-stream.com	Free ISP which uses on-screen ads to offer enhanced member services	0870 7306466	1 Unified
F9 Free	www.f9.net.uk	Free ISP from previously subscription-only service Force 9	0800 0737800	Unlimited
Gateway 2000	www.ukgateway.net	ISP service from the hardware retailers of the same name	Sign up online	5
Powergen	www.pgen.net	ISP from PowerGen: gives points which you can use in paying bills	Sign up online	5
Free Internet	www.free-internet.co.uk	Free access, free mail and Webspace	Sign up online	1
Freeserve	www.freeserve.net	Free provider which is often said to have invented the free ISP model	0990 500049	Unlimited
Freenet	www.freenet.co.uk	Free access with a gaming bias. Online auto signup and newsgroups	01329 828282	Unlimited
Dabsol	www.dabsol.net	Free ISP with online sign-up help and comprehensive features	Sign up online	Unlimited
Smartone	www.smartone.co.uk	Content based service offering free dial-ups and rewards for visiting	08700 774411	1 Unified
Breathe	www.breathe.co.uk	Still trading as an ISP following its recent acquisition	0800 500150	5
Go Free	www.gofree.co.uk	Free ISP offering online signup, complete with helpline	Sign up online	Unlimited
Tiny Online	www.tinyonline.net	Innovative ISP with a beginner's guide to the Net	0900 290 9103	5
Freewire	www.freewire.net	Free ISP without any signup requirements – just dial 0845 088 0088	Sign up online	Unlimited
Callnet	www.callnetuk.com	Innovative free ISP offering enhanced Web-based services	0171 3358300	5
Freeway	www.freewayuk.com	Free access, free mail and Webspace. Comprehensive service	0906 6903319	Unlimited
Virgin Net	www.virgin.net	Long-standing ISP now offering a stylish free Internet access service	0500 558800	5
Free to You	www.free2you.co.uk	No frills free ISP with online sign-up.	Sign up online	Unlimited
OrbitalNet	www.orbitalnet.co.uk	Subscription-based ISP with a range of account options	01233 646505	5
UK Online Ltd	www.ukonline.co.uk	A family friendly free ISP with plenty of shareware & gaming software	01749 333333	1
Eisdosnet	www.eidosnet.co.uk	From the publishers of *Tomb Raider*	Sign up online	Unlimited
Wireplay Internet	www.wireplay.com	Gameplay-owned online games network allowing access to fast servers	0845 757 7577	0
UVNET	www.uv.net	Free ISP offering support on a standard national number	01753 776699	1
This is it!	www.thisisit.co.uk	End-user targeted free ISP	0906 9124000	Unlimited
MONTHLY SUBSCRIPTION Flat-fee packages and specialist ISPs; ideal for peak-time surfing				
Timewarp Internet	www.timewarp.co.uk	Friendly knowledgeable team giving a professional service	0161 950 8855	1
Internet in Nottingham Ltd	www.innotts.co.uk	Local Midlands provider with a long track record	0115 956 2222	1
Luna Internet	www.luna.co.uk	Small customer-friendly ISP	01782 855 655	1
Paradise Internet	www.pins.co.uk	A subscription provider who also author software	01256 414863	1
NewNet Limited	www.newnet.co.uk	Five years' experience in the industry	0845 355 44 55	1
AOL	www.aol.co.uk	A large ISP offering an 'ease of use' service to the home user	0800 3765432	5
Nildram	www.nildram.net	Subscription based ISP with a Low User option	0800 0720460	Unlimited
UKIP Ltd	www.ukip.co.uk	Trading as an ISP since 1995	01772 908000	1
Compuserve	www.compuserve.com	Long-standing ISP who offer free unlimited access for first month	0990 000200	5
ClaraNET Ltd	www.clara.net	Subscription based ISP with a range of account options	0800 3582828	Unlimited
Which? Online	www.which.net	A free ISP from the consumer affairs magazine of the same name	0645 830240	1
BUSINESS ISPs Service providers for small businesses				
Knowall	www.knowall.net	Large business ISP for SMEs and home users with business needs	0207 6101115	Unlimited
Firstnet Services Ltd	www.firstnet.co.uk	Business solution provider developing bespoke IP integration packages	0113 2944224	Unlimited
AdeptWeb Ltd	www.adept.co.uk	Full ISP service range and an ASP for business accounts software	01843 850444	Unlimited
London Web Communications	www.londonweb.net	Connection and Web design , with emphasis on corporate clientel	0208 3494500	3
CYBERphile Internet	www.cyberphile.co.uk	Midlands based provider. Specialists in leased lines, LANs, firewalls, ISDN	01543 454840	1
UUNet	www.uk.uu.net	Wide range of business solutions and Pipex Dial	08702 424220	12
FDD Ltd	www.fdd.co.uk	A Netscalibur-acquired company offering IP integration services	01865 321003	1
AngliaNet Limited	www.anglianet.co.uk	Dial-up, Web hosting and design for home and business users	01473 211922	1
Netscalibur	www.netscalibur.co.uk	Promising pan-European provider taking the place of Dircon	0800 0720000	Unlimited
CIX	www.cix.co.uk	Specialise in conferencing and voiceover IP plus a package of ISP services	0845 3555050	Unlimited
Charis Internet Services	www.charis.co.uk	Customer support for online businesses	0121 248 5800	1
GTS Netcom	www.netcom.net.uk	Dial-ups and Web hosting for the home and business user	0800 9809107	20
Easynet Ltd	www.easynet.net	Winner of Best European ISP at this years ISPA awards	0171 6814444	Unlimited

KEY **EMAIL ADDRESSES** *The number of free email addresses your ISP will provide.* **CONTENT** *Outlines whether the service provider provides exclusive content.* **MAC SUPPORT** *Not all service providers offer software and tech support for Apple Macs.* **MODEM SUPPORT** *Check your hardware to see whether your ISP can get the best out of your modem.*

Reliability, speed of connection and value for money are the three criteria we weigh up to objectively identify the best ISPs and award star ratings.

Variation in modem speed Measures whether you get a constant speed once connected. Each ISP starts with 100 percent and loses position the greater the variance in connection speed.

Variation in time to connect The reading is taken from the stage between clicking 'Connect' and physical connection.

Availability Measures how many times an ISP refuses to connect, through the engaged tone or failure to respond correctly to modem signals.

Our ISP testing is carried out by NetBasics, an independent company specialising in providing ISP information for consumers and businesses. NetBasics makes every effort to ensure that the data presented to you is correct. The publishers of *the net* and NetBasics cannot be held liable for any damages caused by the publication of this data. Any ISP that wishes to be included in the evaluation programme should contact ***eval@netbasics.com***. For more information on NetBasics, visit its Web site at ***www.netbasics.com***.

CONTENT	MAC SUPPORT	MODEM SUPPORT	SET-UP FEE (£)	MONTHLY CHARGE (£)	PHONE SUPPORT CHARGES	PHONE SUPPORT HOURS	VERDICT: RELIABILITY AND SPEED
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	Premium rate	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	National rate	24/7	★★★★★
Chat, news, lifestyle, shopping, personal finance	No	K56flex	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	None	National	7-11, 7 days	★★★★★
Yahoo! portal site	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
Newsgroups & IE5 download	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★★
None	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★★
Games links and independent status	Yes	K56Flex, X2	None	None	National rates	9-6pm 7 days	★★★★★
None	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★☆
Original portal site with links of general interest	Yes	V.90	None	None	Metered	9-6 Mon-Sat 10-5 Sun	★★★★☆
Entertainment, sport, shopping, finance etc	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	24/7	★★★★☆
Search engine, Hotmail, channels, Tiny PC sales	No	V.90	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90	None	None	Local	24/7	★★★★☆
Chat servers and a search engine	Yes	K56Flex	None	None	Local	24/7	★★★★☆
News, sport, weather, shopping and more	No	K56Flex	None	None	Free	24/7	★★★★☆
Virgin channels including news,TV and radio	Yes	X2	None	None	50p per minute/online	24/7	★★★☆☆
Search engine page and technical support	No	V.90	None	None	50p per minute	n/a	★★★☆☆
None	Yes	V.90, K56Flex	None	None	Available soon	Business Hours	★★★☆☆
Comprehensive portal content	Yes	K56Flex	None	None	Local	24/7	★★★☆☆
Free access to the Mplayer games network	No	V.90	None	None	National	24/7	★★☆☆☆
Games news, games chat, games add-ons	No	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	None	Local	12pm - 12 am, 7 days	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	None	National	24	★★☆☆☆
None	No	K56Flex	None	None	Free	24/7	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	100.00 p/a	Metered	9am-7pm	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	See Site	Local	24/7	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	12.50	Local	8am-9pm, 7 days	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, X2	None	8.00	National	11-7 M-F	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	99.49p/a	Local	9am-10pm	★★★★★
Range of content, from chat to holidays	Yes	V.90	None	9.99	Free	8-10.30 M-F 9-9.30 Sa	★★★★☆
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	None	11.75	50p per minute	8am-9pm, 7 days	★★★★☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	125.00 p/a	25p per minute	8am-6pm, 7 days	★★★☆☆
Portal style site with a large range of channels	No	V.90	None	7.50	50p per minute	8-12 Midnight 7 Days	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	K56Flex, X2	None	8.99	Free	24/7	★★☆☆☆
Online shopping with consumer protection	Yes	K56Flex	None	7.75	Free	24/7	★★☆☆☆
Business search, 12 channels, domain registration	No	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	None	Metered	24/7	★★★★★
Search engines and support	Yes	V.90, K56Flex, X2	None	12.50	Local	Business Hours	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90, K65Flex	None	100.00 p/a	Local	8:30am-6pm	★★★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex	15.00	12.50	Standard	9-9 M-Sa	★★★★★
None	Yes	33.6	None	11.74	Standard	8.30-6.00 M-F	★★★★★
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	Apply	Apply	Call	9-8 M-F, 10-6 Sat	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	22.00 p/a	Free	9am-5.30pm	★★★★★
None	Yes	V.90	None	11.75	Mobile	9-5 M-F, 8-9 M-S, Sun 12-6	★★★★★
None	Yes	K56Flex, X2	None	11.49	Local	9-9 7days	★★★★☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	14.99	National	8 - 10 M-F, 11-6 S/S	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	V.90	None	15.00	50p per minute	8am - 7pm, 7 days	★★☆☆☆
None	No	V.90, K56Flex	None	14.95	Free	24/7	★★☆☆☆
None	Yes	K56Flex	None	11.99	£1 per minute/via e-mail	24/7	★★☆☆☆

SET-UP FEE *Some ISPs charge a fee to open an account.* **MONTHLY CHARGE** *If you don't go with a free ISP, then you'll pay a set monthly fee.* **PHONE SUPPORT CHARGES** *Tech support's great – as long as you're not having to pay a fortune for it.* **PHONE SUPPORT HOURS** *When the tech support desk will be open to take your calls.*

Fight for your ISP rights

Beleaguered Web users get a champion to battle their corner at last

Internet users at last have a champion to fight for their rights in their relationship with their service provider. The new UK ISP Users Group (UKISPUG) has been formed to offer help, advice and information on all ISP-related matters – and the body promises that it will be impartial and free of charge.

The organisation's forums are already buzzing with service provider news and information, whether dial-up or broadband. As we went to press, topics under discussion on their site ranged from Plusnet's recent actions against 1100 of its user base to opinions on AOL's 24/7 flat-fee dialup.

Dave Burns, founder of the group, encourages people to get in touch with their ISP's customer services department in the first instance, but then to try UKISPUG if that proves fruitless. The organisation has already successfully mediated on behalf of several people who felt an ISP treated them unfairly. In one case, a user of TheFreeInternet became liable for a large fee after supposedly using the dial-up for business purposes – UKISPUG managed to get the fee waived.

'The ISPs are speaking to us, and dealing with us as equals,' says Burns, who keeps members updated on news and activities in an email newsletter. 'Our aim is to be a mediatory group. We want to educate the ISPs in what users expect, and also to educate the users.' ***www.ukispusersgroup.co.uk***

Second fixed-fee revolution takes off

The second generation of flat-fee dial-ups is proving a hit with British Internet users – with the result that a host of ISPs are now leaping aboard the bandwagon.

BT Internet (***www.btinternet.com***) recently made it public that it has signed up its one millionth customer – take-up has been particularly brisk since BT introduced its flat-fee £15 a month service. That places BT ahead of AOL and behind Freeserve in popularity terms.

Meanwhile, the recently-resurrected Breathe (***www.breathe.com***) is joining the fray with a £15 per month deal, while Plusnet (***www.plusnet.co.uk***) is moving to a flat-fee model. Look out for 08002go (***www.08002go.com***), which will soon be offering dial-ups at £5.83 a month without a yearly contract.

Smart surfers take it to the X-Stream

TOP ISPs OUR CHOICE FOR SPEED AND VALUE

X-Stream takes this month's top honours for off-peak Net users. The ISP offers access to the Internet through an advertising-supported service, meaning that while on the Net you can expect banner adverts at the top of your screen. This is a small price to pay for a full-quality free service, with a wealth of useful content. Recent trials of 0800 access mean users can enjoy an off-peak toll-free service, too. The use of advertising makes us think that this ISP could possibly become the first to offer completely free Net access without compromising on quality.

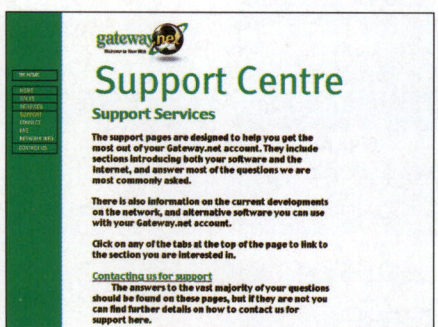
For peak-hour surfers, we recommend Gateway 2000 – Gateway has remained a high performer since its inception in NetBasics tests conducted in both the UK and RoI. Gateway offers a robust and reliable connection to the Internet without subscription charges, as well as a full complement of account features. A Yahoo-supplied site gives Gateway a fully-featured Internet portal. Sadly, phone support costs £1 a minute.

Business users will be more than happy with AdeptWeb. The main feature of any business Internet access service must be performance, and Adept is a high-performing ISP offering every service needed to access the Internet, create an online store and maintain an Intranet. It also offers entry level e-commerce solutions such as Actinic and an ASP service targeted at SMEs.

EVENING & WEEKEND SURFERS

THE X-STREAM NETWORK *www.x-stream.com*

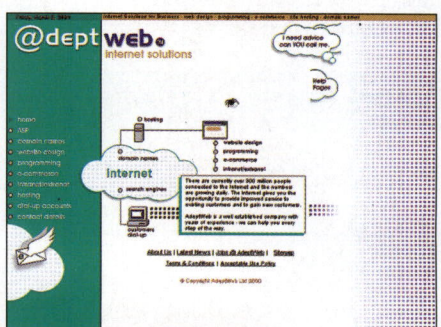
A quality company with a sustainable business model. Using adverts to keep down users' costs is a neat idea, and you'll find the banners aren't too much of a distraction.



HEAVY HOME USERS

GATEWAY 2000 *www.ukgateway.net*

While high-performing toll-free ISPs are still a minority, the next best option for a peak time Internet user is a generic free ISP. Gateway, the computer retailer, delivers on all fronts.



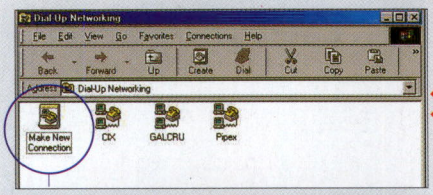
BUSINESS USERS

ADEPTWEB *www.adept.co.uk*

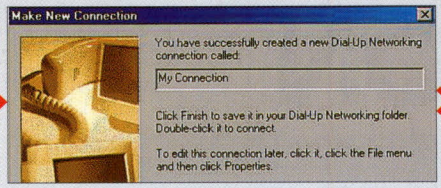
One of a new range of business ISPs offering just about everything you could possibly need to set up online, including plenty of relevant software and the ability to build a Web store.

WHY BE AT THE MERCY OF ONE CONNECTION?

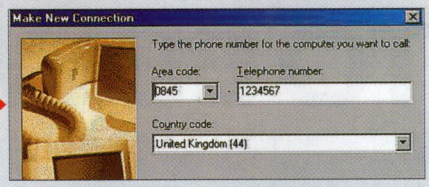
HOW TO SWITCH ISPS IN SECONDS»



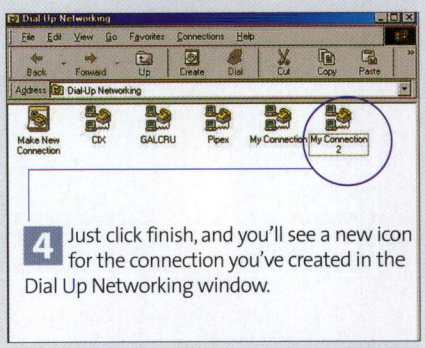
1 To make your new connection, go Start > Programs > Accessories > Communications > Dial Up Networking. Then just click the 'make new connection' icon.



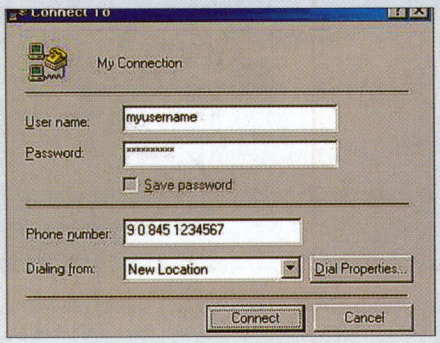
2 Start by typing in your intended ISP's name (your PC should automatically choose your modem), then click Next.



3 Now type in the new ISP's telephone number (you'll get this just by calling them and asking) and make sure you choose the correct country to show where you're dialling from.



4 Just click finish, and you'll see a new icon for the connection you've created in the Dial Up Networking window.



TOP TIPS

Copy the new connections onto your desktop. That way, when one ISP won't connect, you can simply switch to another one in seconds, rather than having to navigate back to the Dial Up Networking window.

5 Double-click the new icon to access the window into which you should input the username and password supplied by the new ISP. Hit 'connect', and dialling should begin...

Small ISPs under threat

Cloud 9: taking British Telecom to task over smaller ISPs' rights

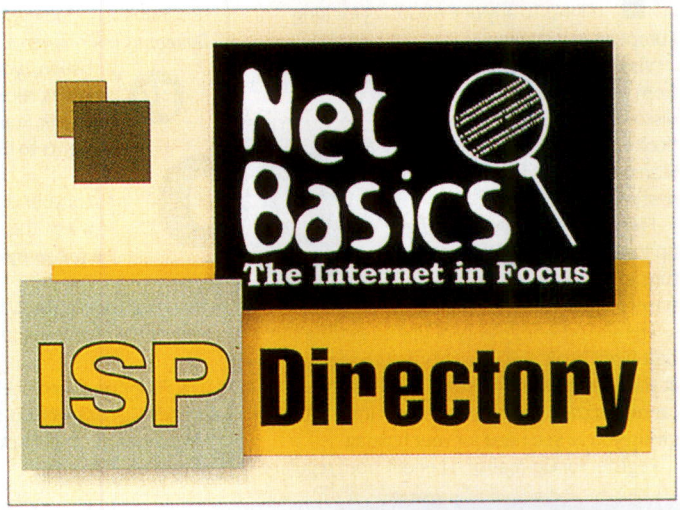
Internet users who still prefer the personal service of small, independent ISPs may find themselves forced into using the big corporate service providers, if BT's charging model for the minnows has the effect predicted by industry analysts.

The new FRIACO (Fixed Rate Internet Access Call Origination) system means that ISPs control their own destiny. Rather than having to pay a percentage to BT for every call made, calls are patched directly through to the ISP's equipment, making flat-fee access a reality.

The way the market is developing now, however, many of those small companies could be put out of business. BT is only selling the Surfports, through which end-users connect to the ISP's equipment, in large 1500 port versions – great if you're a massive ISP, but not so grand if you're smaller fry.

So bad is the situation that ISP Cloud 9 has officially complained to industry watchdog Oftel about the situation, pointing out that it managed to support its entire user base with just 200 ports and was unable to afford the couple of million pounds BT is asking.

Industry analysts predict that unless BT starts selling a smaller Surfport for smaller ISPs, many of them will face bankruptcy as they find their user-base drifting away to ISPs offering flat-fee access.



Blow through the mist surrounding Internet Service Provision with desktop software designed by NetBasics, the leading ISP industry research organisation.

The ISP Directory features over 100 key facts and pricing information for nearly 200 UK ISPs including every industry leader.

For further info, visit:
www.netbasics.com

Net Basics™
NetBasics, The Internet in Focus
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Telephone 0113 246 0009 in the UK

competition»

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2. Look in the What's New section and find a benefit of registering to receive Go Mail

3. Fill in the coupon below and post it to: ***the net*/Go competition, Haymarket Consumer Magazines, 38-42 Hampton Road, Teddington, Middlesex, TW11 0JE.**

GET ME OUT OF HERE! (YOUR DETAILS)

MR/MRS/MS .....

ADDRESS .....

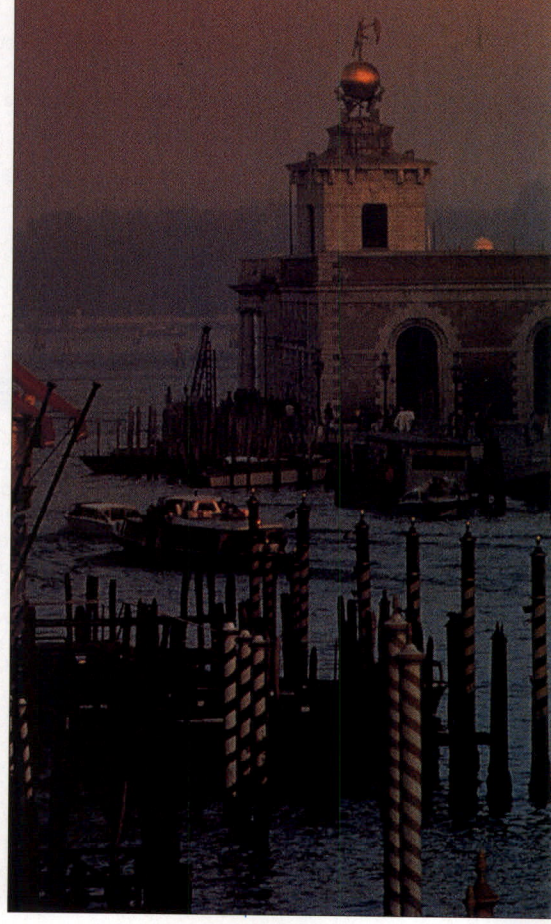
.....

POSTCODE ..... TELEPHONE .....

EMAIL ..... ANSWER .....

Terms & Conditions The closing date for entries is 2nd May 2001. Entrants must be resident in the UK. The prize winners will be chosen from all the correct entries received by 2nd May 2001. All prize winners will be notified within 2 weeks of the draw. No cash alternative or substitute prizes will be allowed. The competition organisers reserve the right to supply a prize of similar value and specification if the named prize is unavailable. The decision of the organisers is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Information on the winners of the competition will be available within 2 weeks of the published closing date and will be supplied upon receipt of a stamped self-addressed envelope.
Return flights must be completed by 15 September 2001. Flights are subject to availability and are non-transferable, non-refundable and non-changeable. Both return flights must be taken at the same time. Accommodation, car hire and holiday insurance are not included in the prize.

If you would prefer not to receive information and offers from Haymarket Consumer Magazines or other carefully selected companies, please tick here ❑ If you are a subscriber to the net please tick here ❑



Venice: you could be cruising the canals soon

Getting started

Surf the Web

SIMPLE, THIS. YOU NEED A computer (commonly a PC running Microsoft Windows, but some people use strange things called Apple Macintoshes), a means of connecting to the Internet (a modem device usually built into the computer, plus an account to dial in to) and a means of seeing the Web pages (that's a browser).

BROWSERS Usually free of charge and pre-installed on new PCs. If not, you can download one from the Internet (use your employer's network; it'll be cheaper and quicker) or from a CD (you'll find them in magazines like this one). Current champion is Microsoft's Internet Explorer (***www.microsoft.com/windows/ie***), but lagging not far behind is Netscape's reliable, adaptable and recently much-improved Navigator (***home.netscape.com/uk/download***). However, there are many 'rebel' browsers either designed for a specific computing platform or boasting strength at a particular function (see below).

NET CONNECTION Most modern PCs come with a built-in modem, a device that will dial your Internet Service Provider (see p116) and connect you to the Internet. Most modems these days run at 56K; OK, but hardly rapid fire. If you want to go quicker, you'll need to look at either 64K/128K ISDN, eg BT's Home Highway, or else 10Mbps ADSL (a permanent, zip-quick connection; for details see ***www.btopenworld.com***). Remember that most ISPs charge for connection, either in the form of a fixed fee (say £9.99 a month) or on a pay-as-you-go basis (say 1p a minute). Consider at what times you surf most and exactly how much before choosing your tariff.

TOP TIP

Streamline your web browsing

Web pages can take a while to appear, due to the speed of your modem or the sheer volume of Internet traffic. So to save time, use your browser's multi-window facility (Ctrl-N on a PC in Internet Explorer) and have one page load while you read the other one.

YOUR COMPUTER Virtually every modern PC is quick enough to handle the software required to surf the Internet. Your only choice really is platform: while most plump for PCs running Microsoft Windows, recent years have seen a resurgence in the fortunes of the Apple Mac (mostly thanks to the cutesy iMac). Needless to say, new Internet software is written for PC first, Mac some time after – and the huge and growing online gaming industry is virtually built around PC.

Explorer 5.5: plain grey in PC guise; functional but extremely solid

New Netscape 6.01: colourful, and funky, but not the most stable browser ever

MAY 2001 BORED WITH EXPLORER OR NETSCAPE?

BROWSER ALTERNATIVES>>

PC BROWSERS

BROWSER	RATING	FOR	AGAINST	DOWNLOAD FROM
AMAYA	★★☆☆☆	Great for those into Net standards...	...not for those who aren't	*www.w3.org/Amaya/User/BinDist.html*
ARACHNE	★★☆☆☆	It runs in DOS and is written by Czechs	A pain to set up	*arachne.cz*
CUSTOM BROWSER	★☆☆☆☆	Adds minimal extra customisation to IE	It's just IE with an ad in the top panel	*www.custombrowser.com*
HOTJAVA	★★☆☆☆	Pretty showcase for Java technology	Slow, though not as bad as on the Mac	*java.sun.com/products/hotjava/3.0*
INTERNET EXPLORER	★★★★★	For the moment, the king of all browsers	Hard to fault, unless you really try	*www.microsoft.com/windows/ie*
LYNX	★★★★☆	The original text-only browser	If it isn't text, Lynx isn't interested	*lynx.browser.org*
MOSAIC	★★★☆☆	Good for developers	Feels old. Is old. Not updated since 1996	*www.ncsa.uiuc.edu/SDG/Software/mosaic-w*
NEOPLANET	★★★★☆	Funky interface replacement for Explorer	Internet Explorer in new clothes	*www.neoplanet.com*
NETSCAPE NAVIGATOR 6	★★★★☆	Wide range of features for hardcore users	Doesn't display pages as prettily as IE	*www.netscape.co.uk*
OPERA	★★★★☆	Faster than IE or Netscape	Bit of a stickler for standards	*www.opera.com*
MSN EXPLORER	★★★★☆	Easy to use, integrates with PIM functions	Right now, it's US-only content	*msn.explorer.com*
MAC BROWSERS				
ICAB	★★★★☆	Fast. Gets rid of irritating ad banners	Could support more features	*www.icab.de*
INTERNET EXPLORER 5.0	★★★★★	State-of-the-art browsing on the Mac	Can be memory-hungry	*www.microsoft.com/Mac/ie*
NETSCAPE NAVIGATOR 6.01	★★★★★	Packed with features; look can be themed	Has .01 update made it less buggy?	*www.netscape.com*
OPERA FOR MAC	★★★★☆	Fast; offers tons of control over page look	Still in 'Technology Preview' guise	*www.opera.com/download/mac*

Send and receive email

EMAIL: THE STUFF THAT HAS THE Royal Mail quivering in its boots (after all, who sends letters any more?). But before you can enjoy the visceral thrills of sending mail instantly through cyberspace (80 percent of email apparently makes it to its recipient within five minutes) you'll need an address and a means of sending and receiving your post.

The former you can get either by signing up with an Internet Service Provider (or ISP, see page 116), getting one from your employer (many firms now have big networks and will afford you a name as part of the job), or through one of the web-based email service providers (such as Yahoo!, Hotmail, excite, etc). But what are the pros and cons of each option?

WEB-BASED EMAIL Dead handy if you travel a lot; once you have your password after signing up, you can check your mail from any Internet café or any place with a Net-linked PC. Some Web-based email service providers even offer the facility to forward and send mail through such desktop software as Microsoft Outlook or Eudora. The catch? Many have a rather clumsy interface, and sending and receiving mail can be slow, especially when America wakes up in the morning and logs on. Make sure you keep a duplicate of your address book and favourites on your hard drive, otherwise if your web-based account goes down, so do all your contact details. If you fancy checking it out, you can start an account at ***www.yahoo.co.uk***, or head along to either ***www.hotmail.com*** or ***www.excite.co.uk.***

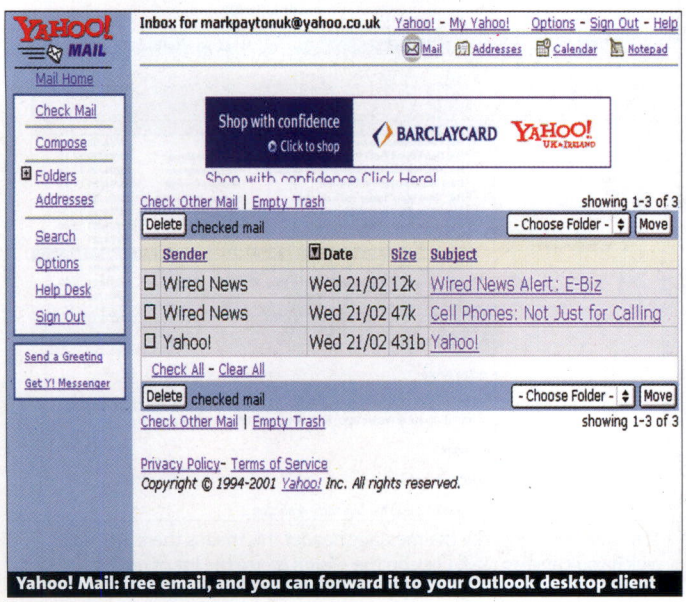
YOUR SERVICE PROVIDER When you sign up with an ISP, you'll be given at least one email address to use, and most will even provide the email software you need to get started (usually Outlook, although do remember that you're rarely stuck with it; you can choose between the leading packages outlined in the column to the right). The catch? You may find it difficult to read email from these accounts at your workplace, unless you can be bothered to manually forward mail to yourself for the next day, that is.

YOUR EMPLOYER This usually means using whatever software your employer provides (which is invariably the networked version of Outlook), and you can't access your email from home using your own PC (unless your bosses love you enough to set you up there as well). The upside? It's all free of charge.

TOP TIP

Keep your web email private

The big problem with using a Web browser to read your email is that browsers have a 'cache' in which your private correspondence is stored. This is a problem if you're using a public machine (such as in a cybercafe) because anyone could read your emails after you've been on the machine. To get round this, always use your email service's 'Log-Off' facility, which flushes the cache of all your email.

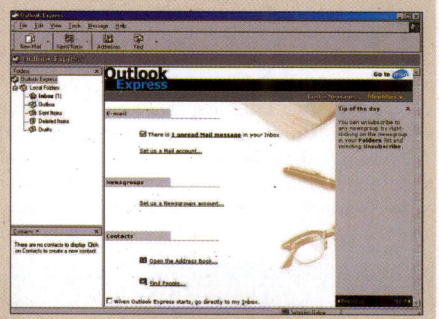


Yahoo! Mail: free email, and you can forward it to your Outlook desktop client

ARE THE RIGHT PEOPLE HANDLING YOUR POST?

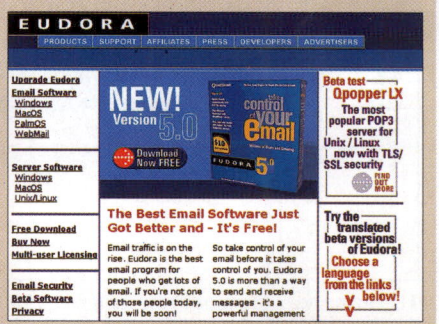
EMAIL CLIENTS>>

Microsoft Outlook Express 5 ★★★★☆



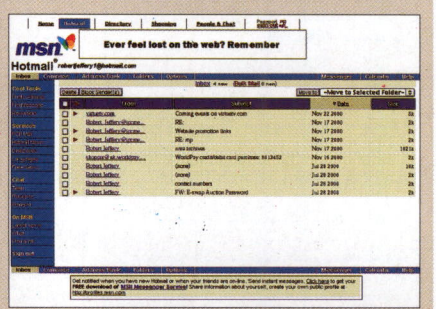
If your PC came with IE5+, you're most likely already using Express 5. And that's a good thing: the latest Outlook is easy to use and set up, and now features such useful extras as Hotmail support (you can download your Hotmail messages for working offline, or synch your Hotmail and Express address books). And with so many families now having individual email addresses, Outlook makes setting up individual accounts fuss free. Available for both PC and Mac, the download is at ***www.microsoft.com/windows/oe***.

Eudora 5.0 ★★★★★



Launched back in September, the latest Eudora is available in Paid ($49.95), Sponsored and Light modes. Both of the latter can be grabbed free from ***www.eudora.com***. While Light is stripped down, Sponsored features ads (see picture, right). Either way, the Eudora package is excellent; the interface is attractive and intuitive, while the package integrates well with the address book. 5.0 even includes a novel 'MoodWatcher' – a feature that affords mail a 'red chilli pepper' rating according to the strength of its 'inflammatory' language.

MSN Hotmail ★★★★☆



The web-based service that got the whole ball rolling. Sign up for a free account, and get an email address and a password. There's a 2Mb limit on your inbox, and an Inbox Protector to fight off spam mail. The Hotmail Alert service will notify your pager or mobile telephone of incoming messages. Sign up at ***www.hotmail.com***, or try either ***www.yahoo.co.uk*** or ***www.excite.co.uk*** instead; the services are all pretty similar.

Netscape Mail ★★★★☆

Now bundled in with the new Netscape 6 browser, Mail runs Outlook Express neck-and-neck; as with the Microsoft product, there's full integration with its built-in address book. True to the philosophy of the 6 browser, the themed Mail interface tries to pack in as much 'user friendliness' as possible. The 'My Sidebar' feature, for example, is carried over from the browser. Don't forget to go grab the latest, de-bugged update to 6 (6.01) from ***www.netscape.com***.

Newsgroups

Whatever topic tickles your fancy, there'll be a newsgroup dedicated to it on the Net. Here's how to join up

Newsgroups are one of the older services on the Internet. Each group is like a bulletin board – anyone can post messages to different newsgroups, and anyone can read the postings. There are tens of thousands of different newsgroup subjects available, so there will be one that matches your interests, whether you're looking for info on beekeeping or book-keeping, computers or comics, sewing or sailing.

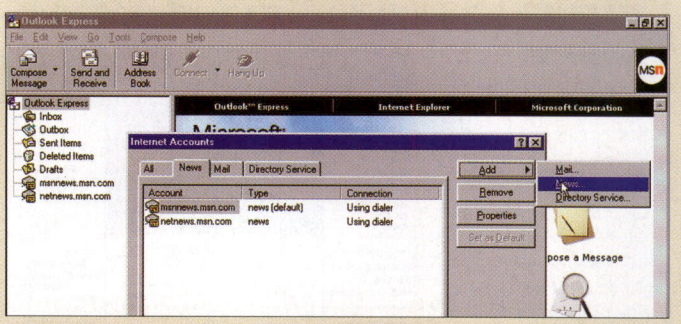
Although the Web has plenty of information on most subjects, newsgroups will often provide more detailed answers to questions. If you have a question on a specific subject, you can receive half a dozen responses in two hours. The most famous newsgroup system is Usenet. This is structured like a tree, with a few large branches and thousands of smaller ones. The large branches are top-level discussion categories, such as rec (recreation), which contain smaller branches, such as rec.art. These categories contain messages themselves but are also broken down further into even more specific branches, such as rec.arts.comics, which contain messages from people who are interested in that topic.

If you don't want to go to the bother of configuring Outlook Express or other newsgroup access software, visit DejaNews ***www.deja.com*** – a Web-based interface to newsgroups. You can read and send messages from here, all via your Web browser. Simple.

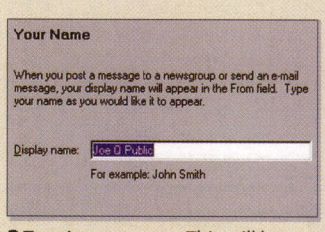
Your ISP will provide you with its own news server access, or visit ***esalesbiz.com/web/nntplst.htm*** which links to hundreds of free access news servers. To add more servers to Outlook Express, go through the setting-up steps outlined below.

ACCESSING NEWSGROUPS USING OUTLOOK EXPRESS

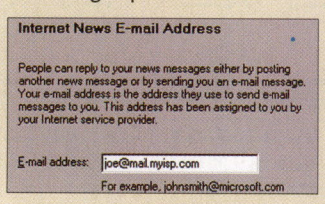
STEP BY STEP>>



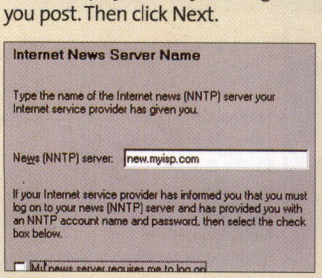
1 Go to the Accounts entry in the Tools menu, click on the News tab to list your current news accounts (if any), hit Add and choose News.



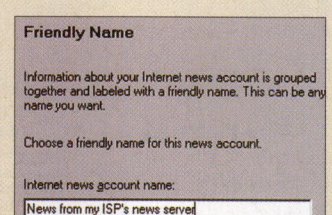
2 Type in your name. This will be displayed in any message you post to a newsgroup. Then hit Next.



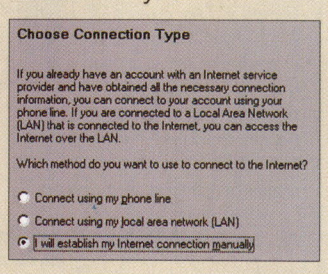
3 Type in your email address. This will be displayed in any message you post. Then click Next.



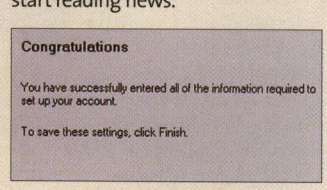
4 Enter the name of your ISP's server which should be given in your user documentation.



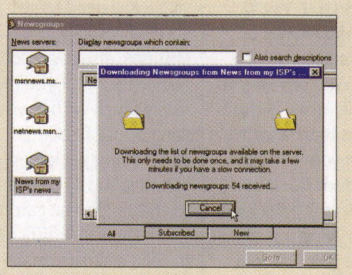
5 Give the news server a name that makes sense to you.



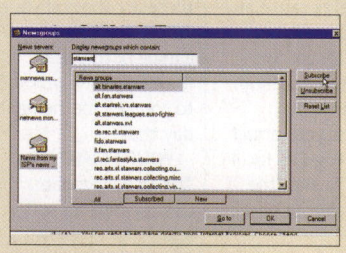
6 Tell Outlook Express that you will dial your ISP manually before you start reading news.



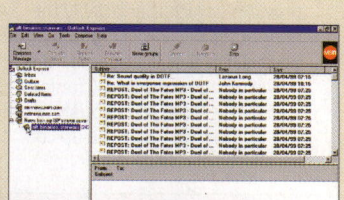
7 And you're done! You have now set up a newsgroup access account. Now let's see how to use it.



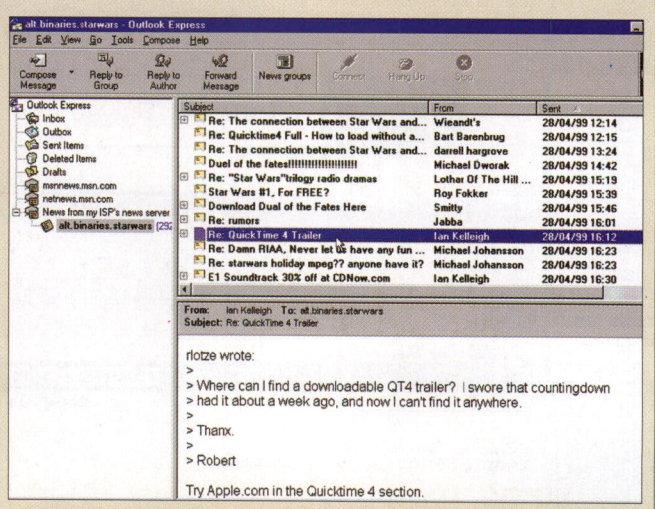
8 After hitting Close, you're asked if you want to download your ISP's list of newsgroups. When you click Yes, the list will be downloaded, so make sure you're online. This can take up to 10 minutes when you first connect, because you are downloading the names of thousands of newsgroups.



9 Once all the newsgroups are downloaded, you can explore. If you want to find *Star Wars* postings, for example, type 'starwars' into the text field at the top of the window to display all newsgroups containing that word. You can subscribe to as many groups as you want.



10 To access a message inside a newsgroup, click on the subject header to read a summary. Double click the header and the whole message downloads, appearing on the lower half of the screen.



11 If there is a '+' sign by the message header this means there are replies which you can also read. Click on the '+' sign to see the list of replies.

Online chat

How to hold virtual conversations with friends and strangers, experts and celebrities

Online chat lets you communicate with other people, often in real time. In other words, you type in comments, send them over the Net and they're seen almost immediately. And you're only paying for a local phone call, even if you are 'talking' to someone on the other side of the world.

You can 'chat' with friends and relatives in other countries without running up massive phone bills. Or join in an online discussion on your favourite subject with an expert.

There's the opportunity to ask a celebrity questions during a moderated 'conference', or talk to complete strangers on the other side of the world.

'Smileys' are a way of including an indication of emotion in your messages. They are useful when, for example, you are making a joke and you want to be sure that the recipient realises you're not being serious. Hang a relevant smiley on the end of your sentence by typing in the relevant characters, but do try not to over-use them. To 'read' them, just turn the page 90 degrees to the left ;-) got it? Here are the four most used smileys:

- :-) The original smiley. Indicates a joke, or just a happy person!
- ;-) Wink
- :-o Shock (an open mouth)
- :-(Unhappy

Don't register your details with a site unless you really want to. Often chat software will ask for your name and other info. Be wary; you don't know what it'll be used for.

If you are looking for romance online, use caution. Don't reveal your home address and if you decide to meet up, make sure someone knows where you're going, as you would if meeting someone from a magazine or newspaper ad.

If text chat seems a bit flat, try 3D chat, where users take on a 'persona' and actually walk round chat rooms. Try ***www.virtualzones.com*** for starters.

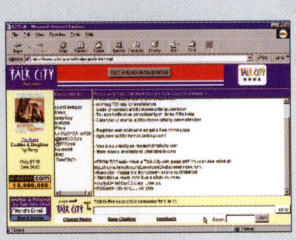
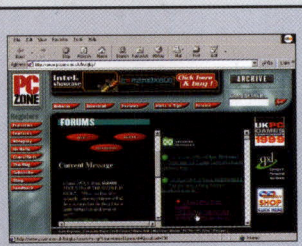
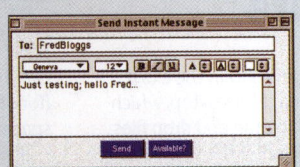
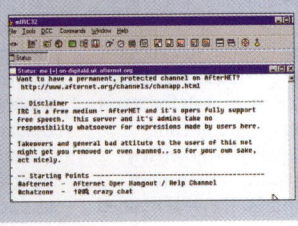
TOP TIP

Find-a-friend

If you're having trouble tracking down people in IRC, the odds are that they're on a different IRC server to you. These tend to function within fairly strict geographic areas, so apart from getting the channel name, get the server – such as *irc.enterthegame.com*

THERE'S MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SPEAK TO THE WORLD...

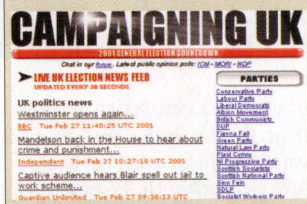
CHAT CHOICES>>

TYPE OF CHAT		FOR & AGAINST	CHAT LINK
LIVE ON A WEB SITE Takes place within the window of your browser on a Web site. Messages come up instantly and can be seen by everyone who is viewing that Web page.		**FOR** Easy to use; no extra software required to run it. **AGAINST** Works on someone's Web site, so the subject will be dictated by them and private chat is unlikely.	***www.talkcity.com*** Online community where you can talk on various subjects, including romance and current affairs.
MODERATED SESSIONS Moderated chats are 'supervised' by a chat room host, who decides whether or not to allow your comments or questions to be displayed. This is the norm for celebrity chats.		**FOR** Discussions are sensibly run. Abusive or annoying people may be screened out. **AGAINST** Only take place at certain times because they require a moderator to be present on the site. Censorship.	***www.chat.beeb.com*** The BBC's celebrity chat service with daily visits from the network's top stars.
REAL-TIME USING EXTRA SOFTWARE Software like AOL's Instant Messenger and ICQ allow you to chat in real time. You don't use a Web browser; the software takes care of everything.		**FOR** Instant response; ability to chat privately to one person. **AGAINST** Requires extra software. Some firms don't allow this to be installed on their PCs, so you may not be able to chat at work.	***www.aol.co.uk/aim*** ***www.icq.com*** Chat one-to-one with your friends in real time on the Net.
IRC IRC (Internet Relay Chat) software lets you talk to many people at once. It can be a pain to use, however; it was, after all, modelled on CB radio.		**FOR** Useful, technical chats are often held on IRC channels. **AGAINST** Software is difficult to use; IRC users can be impatient with newcomers.	***www.mirc.com*** Although it can be tricky to get used to, mIRC is the best software for IRC chat. ***www.ircle.com*** IRC client for Macs.

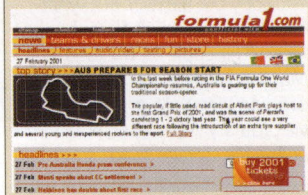
THIS MONTH'S HAPPENING SITES

Explore some of the subjects featured in this month's *the net*...

One of the pioneers of the upcoming broadband revolution – **TELEWEST *www.telewest.co.uk***

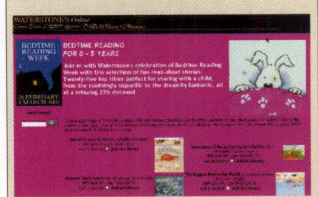


The **ELECTION** is imminent, so check ***www.campaigning.co.uk*** for news free of party spin

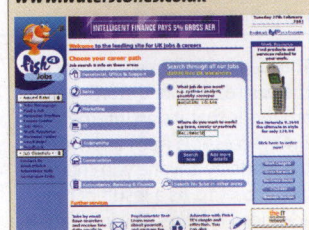


By now the **FORMULA 1** season will be well under way – check the latest news at ***www.formula1.com***

Why **RENT A CAR** when you could hire a Harley and play *Easy Rider* in Cheam? ***www.metalhorse.co.uk***



Visit **WATERSTONES** and find that birthday present book in seconds: ***www.waterstones.co.uk***



Stuck in a **CAREER** rut? Check the database at ***jobs.fish4.co.uk*** and cast off your shackles

ON TEST STORAGE SITES

Build your own Web warehouse

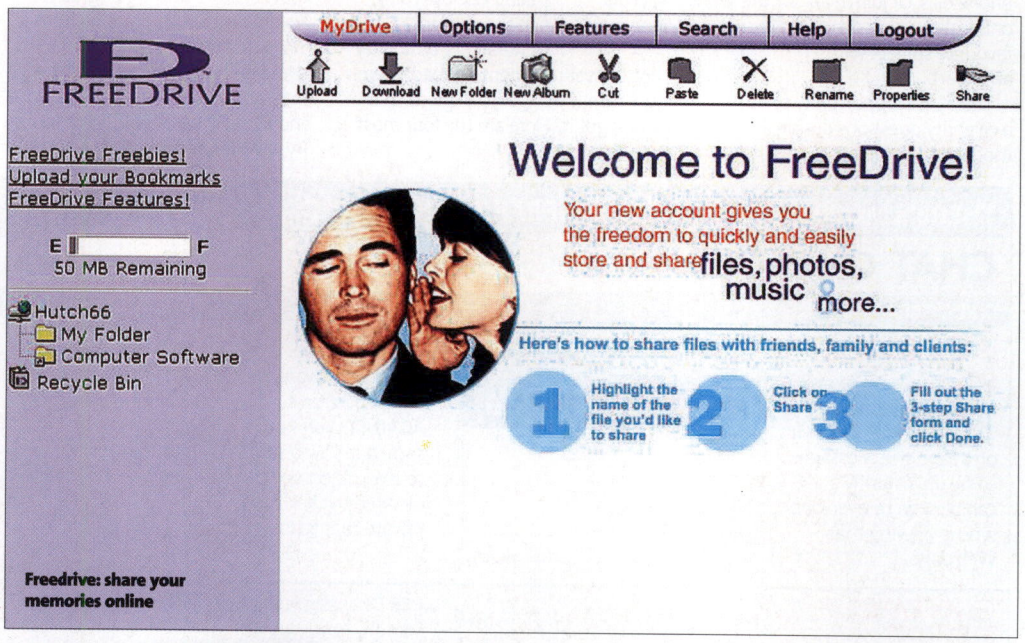
Got big files you need stored safely? We put the best online file storage services to the test

IF YOU USE A COMPUTER AT WORK, then chances are that you're familiar with the whole concept of a Local Area Network (LAN). It is excellent for transferring files between one office PC and another – you simply connect to a colleague's machine and copy the file over. But what happens if you want to exchange files with people on the Internet? Many larger files can't get through company firewalls, or even be sent via ordinary Web-based email. Enter online file storage space, stage left.

The concept behind online file storage is simple. You set up an account through your Web browser and you're then given a basic amount of space which, depending upon the company, could be as little as 5Mb or as much as 50Mb. You can then transfer files to this online space and either keep it private or open it up to the public.

There are numerous uses for online file storage, not least the simple transfer of files without using email. Families with far-flung members are also finding that it's a convenient way to stay in touch; everyone uploads their latest photos and the whole family can see what everyone else is up to.

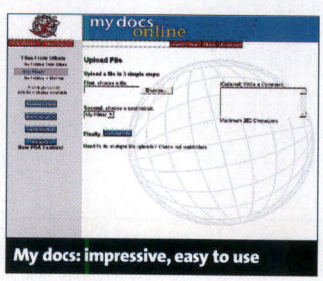
Societies, clubs and online gaming clans are finding that 50Mb of online file storage space can come in extremely handy. Question is, which should you use?



FREEDRIVE

www.freedrive.com ★★★☆☆

The idea behind Freedrive, one of the best-established storage sites around, is that it's an Internet Hard Drive, accessible from anywhere in the world by anyone you choose to give access to. As a result of the advanced features, the interface is a lot trickier to find your way around than with many rival sites. We really liked the Photo Album (where you can share family photos) and MP3 directory options, but we had a lot of problems with the code behind the site. Once we had signed up and tried out the service, we attempted logging back in again an hour later and Freedrive refused to believe that we had an account. Very annoying.



My docs: impressive, easy to use

You get 50Mb of space to play with and, like Yahoo Briefcase, you can keep those files private or open them up to the public and send friends or colleagues a simple URL to access them wherever they are. Freedrive also offers a number of tools that run on your PC, including a file synchronisation facility (so two directories can contain the exact same files) and FD Desktop, which enables you to drag and drop files. It'd all be brilliant if the software was a bit more reliable.

You can access your MP3 collection no matter where you are

MY DOCS ONLINE

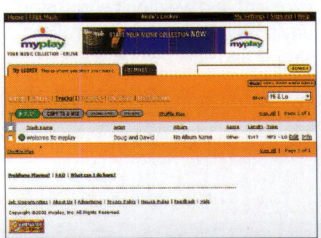
www.mydocsonline.com ★★★★★

The first thing to strike you about this particular site is its ease of use. Whereas some of its rivals force you through hoops just to get an account, we created our own My docs storage space in 10 seconds flat. More importantly, we remained impressed by the whole service when we started digging deeper.

Like Yahoo Briefcase, My docs is extremely easy to use. We were delighted with the file transfer facilities, which worked first time without a hitch, and pleasantly surprised by the transfer speed of documents. On the downside you only get 20Mb of space to play with, but if you really like the service you can upgrade to a premium account (for about £20 a year) and get more space and extra features.

If you're a PC user you can make use of My doc's excellent Web Folders facility. An icon appears in your My Computer window and you can literally drag and drop files from your hard drive into your online storage space. The whole process was extremely simple to set up and, more importantly, it worked brilliantly every time. Oh, and do check out their 'Premium' service, which offers more space and wireless access to email attachments.

Online file storage: use the Web as your warehouse



Myplay: store your MP3 collection

MYPLAY

www.myplay.com

★★★★★

The advantages of keeping files online are numerous (accessibility, safety etc) but what about more fun concepts?Wouldn't it be nice to have access to your MP3 collection from wherever you are in the world? If you're banned from keeping MP3s on your work PC, this is definitely the solution for you, since it enables you to put your entire collection online and listen anywhere.

It took us about 10 seconds to sign up with MyPlay; no intrusive or unnecessary information requested. Amazingly, you get 3Gb of space to play with and uploading MP3s to that space is simplicity itself. The only downside we can see with the whole process is that if you're running off a modem or ISDN it's going to take you a considerable time to get your tunes online.

When your MP3s are online you listen to them via Winamp (or any MP3 player that supports streaming audio) in surprisingly high quality.

MY SPACE

www.myspace.com

★★★☆☆

Like Freedrive, this storage service makes plentiful use of Java, so you get added functionality, but at the cost of some irritating glitches. However, My Space reckons its service is one of the few that is not platform dependent – meaning that PC users can share files with

TOP TIPS FOR SMARTER STORAGE

- **Just because there's a limit on the number of files you can store online doesn't mean you can't set up more than one account. Some online storage companies only allow one account per specific email address, so just make a temporary one at Hotmail.**
- **Pretty much all online file storage services have a photo service, which lets you upload photos to share with family and colleagues no matter where they are in the world.**
- **If you're going to use online storage every day, you'll find that it's well worth installing drag-and-drop software. This enables you to zap files from your hard drive to the online server in exactly the same way that you copy files from one hard drive to another. If you do have a lot of files, make sure you name them sensibly so you know what they are when you come back to them.**
- **Reconnect to your dial-up immediately before uploading anything; imagine the frustration of getting 98 percent of the way through a hefty 20Mb download only to have a timed out message flash on screen.**

Briefcase: share photos with friends

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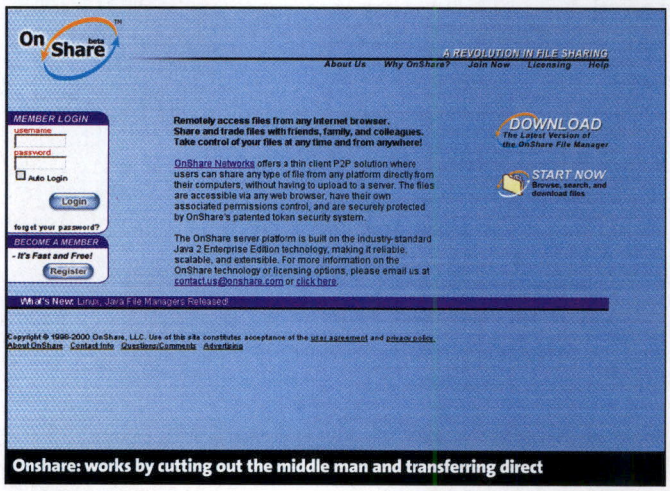

Onshare: works by cutting out the middle man and transferring direct

Macintosh or even Linux users.

The sign-up process itself was extremely drawn-out; we thought the browser had crashed several times, parts of it took so long. If you fill in a smallish survey you qualify for 300Mb of space, otherwise you get 25Mb. We'd advise you to fill in the survey and get the full 300Mb, because you'll be surprised how quickly you eat up space.

My Space offers a similar range of features to other services, including drag-and-drop file transfer and public/private folder access. Its most innovative feature is probably the Web Clipper, which enables you to quickly save any number of pages in one easily accessed location – very handy for online research.

ONSHARE

www.onshare.com

★★★★☆

All the other services we've looked at store the files you use online: they're on a remote server. While this service behaves like a standard online file sharing service, it works in a different way. Although it cancels out the main advantage of remote servers (the safety aspect – if your hard drive failed for instance) it's still a very neat service.

It seems to be far too keen to get friends and family signed up too...

With OnShare, the files you want to share reside on your hard drive. When you sign up, you download a small piece of software (there are versions for Windows, Linux and plain Java for Macs and other systems), create a group and then set a password. Only members of the group can see files being shared.

The advantage of this system is that you don't have to upload large files to the remote server. Instead, when someone wants the file, it gets downloaded directly from your PC to theirs. We also liked the fact that any custom groups you create (you can make as many as you want) come complete with their own bulletin board where members can leave messages for each other.

XDRIVE

www.xdrive.com

★★★★☆

Another company that got in on the whole online file storage market early on, Xdrive seems to be far too keen on getting your friends and colleagues signed up. For every valid email address you supply, it gives you an extra 5Mb of storage space. Why? Perhaps because Xdrive sells the information it receives to anyone who's interested in the demographics of its user base.

For the most part, however, Xdrive is a very reliable service. At no stage did we encounter any of the Java errors that seem to plague some sites, and the whole upload and download process was speedy and simple. Like many of the other companies, Xdrive offers similar drag-and-drop features, but it also has a very funky Xdrive WAP facility which enables you to share, read, delete, and rename your files from any location, at anytime.

The sign-up process with Xdrive was quick and speedy and didn't strike us as unnecessarily intrusive. Transferring files was easy and file management within the Xdrive itself was simple. If we have any gripes about this service, it's that you're sometimes bombarded with 'offers' of various shapes and sizes. To this end it's probably not the best option for business users who are keen to keep their email accounts free of junk mail.

YAHOO BRIEFCASE

uk.briefcase.yahoo.com/

★★★★☆

Most of the big portal sites offer free online file storage facilities (MSN included) but we particularly like the simplicity of Yahoo's offering, which it calls Briefcase.

If you have an existing 'My Yahoo' account, then you already have access to file storage; if not, just sign up at the home page and you'll get a pretty reasonable 30Mb of space

Xdrive: speedy and simple

to play with. The actual storage space is administered via a browser; you just log in and transfer files to and from the server. You can choose whether to keep those files private (very useful if you just want to access files yourself, perhaps between home and work) or make them available to everyone.

Moving, copying and deleting the files that are in your Yahoo Briefcase is extremely simple. During our test period, transfer speeds in both upload and download modes were excellent and we didn't encounter any server down-time. All in all, a simple and effective service

YOUR AT-A-GLANCE GUIDE TO FILE STORAGE PROVIDERS

THE MAIN CONTENDERS>>

NAME	URL	WEB SPACE	UPGRADEABLE	SCORE
MY DOCS ONLINE	*www.mydocsonline.com*	20Mb	Yes	★★★★★
Simple to use and not too taxing on the download times, either. At 20Mb, this isn't the biggest, but it's worth consideration				
MY PLAY	*www.myplay.com*	3Gb	No	★★★★★
Upload your MP3s into one place to access no matter where you are in the world – plus you can listen online, too				
ONSHARE	*www.onshare.com*	n/a	n/a	★★★★☆
A simple way to share files with friends and family. Gives you direct access to others' hard drives to avoid uploading				
XDRIVE	*www.xdrive.com*	20Mb	Yes	★★★★☆
Easy to get started, plus the drag-and-drop features make file transfer a doddle. Also features a WAP facility for access on the move				
YAHOO BRIEFCASE	*uk.briefcase.yahoo.com*	30Mb	No	★★★★☆
The best of the large portal sites' storage facilities. Quick, straightforward and extremely reliable service from a name you know				
FREEDRIVE	*www.freedrive.com*	50Mb	No	★★★☆☆
Not one for simplicity, but handy if you're interested in extra features including file synchronisation and drag-and-drop				
MY SPACE	*www.myspace.com*	25Mb/300Mb	No	★★★☆☆
Has the advantage of being independent of platforms, which means any machine can gain access to your information				

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exclusive interviews

interactive competitions
and chat

authoritative content
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Read all about it

eBooks have come a long way in a short time, so whether you want to read one or write one, read on...

THE CONCEPT OF THE EBOOK HAS taken quite a while to get off the ground. On the whole, the reading public listened to the traditional publishing community, which argued that you couldn't compare the act of thumbing through a real book with the bourgeois process of reading text on a monitor.

Three things happened, however, that changed the print publishing industry's opinions. Firstly, Adobe produced the PDF (portable document file) format. Secondly, eBooks started taking off anyway, despite all the negative publicity. And thirdly several large electronics companies came up with handheld eBooks that you could quite easily 'thumb through' in bed.

It looks like this decade will finally see eBooks come into their own, in both file-based online and eBook offline-compatible formats. So whether you fancy publishing an eBook or you're just a bookworm who'd prefer thousands of trees weren't chopped down so you can read the latest Robert Ludlum, there's plenty to look forward to.

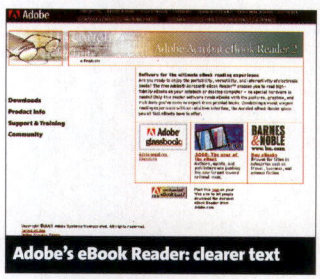
PAPER BOOKS ARE *SO* LAST MILLENNIUM

Thanks to the Internet, pretty much anyone with a half-decent DTP program and a copy of Adobe Acrobat can produce a book in electronic format which is every bit as well-designed as its print equivalent.

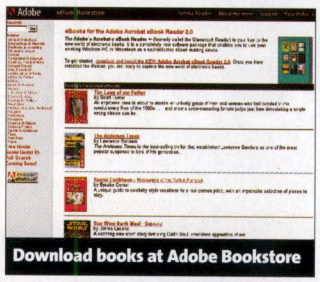
Acrobat's PDF files can be read by anyone with a Web browser, using Adobe's free plug-in for Internet Explorer and Netscape (***www.adobe.com/products/acrobat***). Once you've installed the plug-in you can read all the magazines and books you want; you could, for example, download Richard Tomlinson's controversial book, *The Big Breach*, for free (***thebigbreach.com/download/bbpdf.zip***).

Adobe has taken the concept of ePublishing one step further with the Adobe eBook reader (***www.adobe.com/products/ebookreader***). The key feature of eBook technology is that it uses sub-pixel font rendering, which vastly improves the clarity of on-screen text for LCD displays. There's loads of titles to download at Adobe's Web site (***bookstore.glassbook.com/store/default.asp***).

Microsoft isn't being left out of the picture, either. Its Reader (***www.microsoft.com/reader***) offers similar features to Adobe's eBook technology, but uses its own ClearType technology to remove the jagged feel from on-screen text.

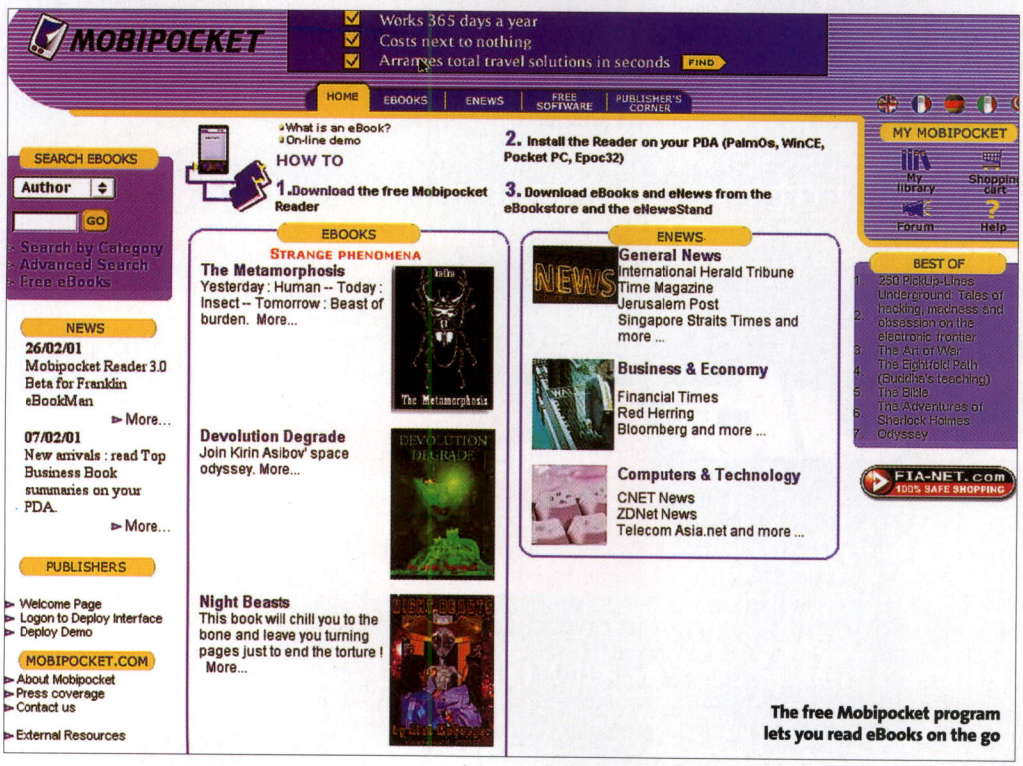


Adobe's eBook Reader: clearer text



Download books at Adobe Bookstore

Microsoft Reader: industry standard



The free Mobipocket program lets you read eBooks on the go

MAKE YOUR LITERARY SCREEN DEBUT

If you're familiar with desktop publishing, you're fully capable of producing an eBook. The process of converting your book into an eBook-friendly format (such as a PDF) is the last step in the process. To begin with, you have to lay the book out, complete with any graphics you're using, exactly as you would if you were going to print it.

The clever bit (apart from the actual writing, that is) comes once you're ready to produce the PDF file. Acrobat intercepts your DTP program's printer driver and renders the pages in its own internal format. When readers open the PDF file, they can flip through it page by page, search for a bit, bookmark pages, zoom in and out (handy for those with poor eyesight) and even print it locally.

Bear in mind, though, that a book created as a PDF file may be upwards of 20Mb big and therefore quite a large download. Also, once your book is in PDF format, anyone with access can copy and distribute it without your receiving a penny.

KEEP YOUR READING HABITS IN HAND

Special devices are appearing on the market which function specifically as electronic book-readers. These handheld, paperback-sized gadgets sit snugly in the palm, offer full colour, can store over 100,000 pages and have rechargeable batteries.

Without a doubt, the most promising eBook device is the Gemstar REB1200 (***www.rca.com***, £399). This nifty gizmo weighs just

33 ounces, has a superb 32,000-colour display and includes a stylus so you can scribble notes in the margins. Its built-in network card and modem let you download books directly from the Internet or your local network.

Franklin's eBookman, on the other hand, bears more than a passing resemblance to a Palm PDA. While it shares some of the same abilities (address book, diary, etc) it has been primarily designed for reading books. It has search and bookmark capabilities, can be used to read thousands of free books and is compatible with any Microsoft

It looks like this decade will see eBooks finally come into their own

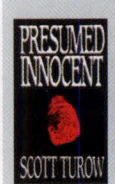
Reader book. It might not offer the same colour display as the flashy RED1200, but then it's a quarter of the price at £100.

If you already own a PDA, such as a PalmOs, WinCE, PocketPC or Epoc32 based device, you can use Mobipocket (***www.mobipocket.com***) to read books on the go. This nifty program is totally free and gives you access to thousands of titles, many of which are either free (mainly out-of-copyright classics) or very cheap, with prices from £1. Why put up with bulky printed books and dog-eared pages any longer?

eBookman: compatible with Microsoft Reader

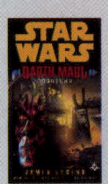
EBOOK TITLES TO TICKLE YOUR FANCY

ALL HUMAN (AND ALIEN) LIFE IS HERE



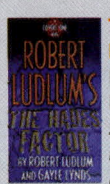
Presumed Innocent
Scott Turow
Price: £3, Microsoft Reader
www.barnesandnoble.com

Courtroom tale about a prosecuting attorney who is charged with the murder of a female colleague with whom he once had an affair. Turow's novel of betrayal, murder and corruption tells the story of a man who puts everything he loves on trial, including his own life.



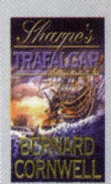
Darth Maul: Saboteur
James Luceno
Price: 70p Microsoft Reader
www.amazon.com

This eBook chronicles Maul's first solo assignment. Written by James Luceno, the author of a duology set in the New Jedi Order series, as well as a forthcoming prequel-era novel, *Cloak of Deception*, Luceno continues his high standards of writing and delivers a piece of quality entertainment.



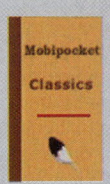
The Hades Factor
Robert Ludlum
Price: £8 Adobe PDF
bookstore.glassbook.com

A homeless man in Boston, an Army Major in California, and a teenage girl in Atlanta all die suddenly and painfully, each the victim of a mysterious doomsday virus. A team of scientists in an American government laboratory try frantically to unlock the virus's deadly secrets...



Sharpe's Trafalgar
Bernard Cornwell
Price: £14 Adobe PDF
www.harpercollins.com

Maritime adventure in which the dashing Richard Sharpe sails right into one of the most momentous naval battles of all time, off Cape Trafalgar, on 21 October 1805, as the massed fleets of Spain and France face the might of the Navy led by Admiral Horatio Nelson.



250 Pick-up Lines
Herbert Hertramph
Price: Free Mobibook Classics
www.mobipocket.com

Corny old chat-ups lines that never fail to raise a pained laugh from friends and pitying looks from the opposite sex. 'Excuse me, do you believe in love at first sight or do I have to walk past you again?', 'You make me so nervous that I've forgotten my pick-up line', etc, etc.

Done in a Flash

A dash of Flash adds sparkle to Sarah Cawood's Web site in part two of our celebrity site-building special

THE LAST TIME WE VISITED SARAH, the Sunstream team had created a basic Web site for her (***www.sarahcawood.net***). The main navigation was in place, the sections were all there and some of the parts of the site, such as the photo library, were live. What was decided on for the next step was an introduction to the site – and what better format to do it in than Flash?

Flash graphics give Sarah's site a real kick

WHAT'S THE STORY?

Whereas coding Web pages is a job tackled by a specialised HTML programmer, Flash tends to be created by graphics designers. That's certainly the case at Sunstream, where Chris Reid, the team's graphic designer, is in charge of all things Flash-related.

To create Sarah's introductory Flash movie, Chris started off with a storyboard because 'you can get all your thoughts out (no matter) how poor at sketching you are.' The storyboard means you can really get a feel for how the animation will work long before you sit down at a computer and start coding it all.

Chris and the Sunstream team find it's useful to talk through the animation during that early storyboard phase. He says: 'We discuss how everything gels together, how bits fade in and out, if there's going to be music, if there's not going to be music.' The objective is for what was an amorphous concept to start becoming a lot more concrete.

DON'T GET TOO FLASHY

If you've seen Flash animations on the Internet (we've included a handy box listing some of the better ones), then you'll soon realise that it's a seriously advanced program. However, many people new to Flash try to create whole movies in the application which, as Chris points out, is a big mistake.

'We don't usually start using Flash immediately,' he says. 'We usually use Illustrator or Photoshop to lay out how the animation might look purely in a static form. Illustrator is ideal for that, because it's vector- based and that's what Flash is as well.' It's this vector form of graphics that some people find confusing. Vector graphics are a series of numbers that describe dimensions and colour, so a circle, for instance, is described by its

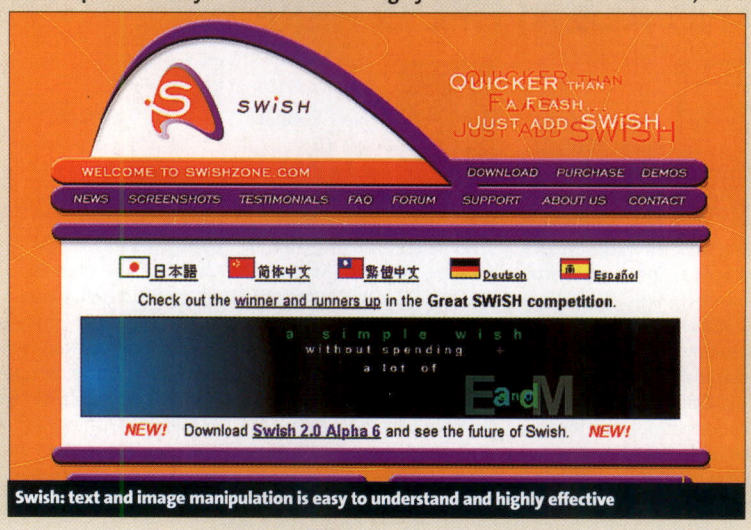
PROGRAMS THAT TAKE THE HARD WORK AWAY

EFFECTS MADE EASY»

As funky as Flash is, it's a complicated application that takes a good deal of skill to manipulate professionally. That's the bad news. The good news is that a whole range of neat Flash-capable applications have appeared on the market that enable anyone (and we mean anyone) to produce slick text and image based Flash animations.

These programs enable you to apply an effect to text or an image just as you would a filter in Photoshop. Let's say, for instance, that you wanted a line of text to explode out from the screen. Creating that effect manually in Flash is a serious undertaking, but if you use a FlashApps, it's a two-second job.

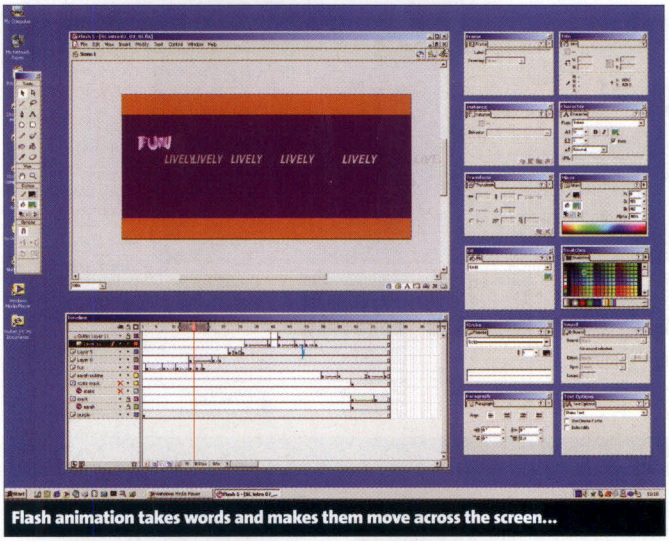
Of all the programs, probably the most accomplished while still being easy to use is Swish (*www.swishzone.com*). It includes about 50 main effects, but it's highly configurable, meaning you can create a near infinite number of variations. Swish lets you manipulate images and text in a way that's both easy to understand and highly effective.



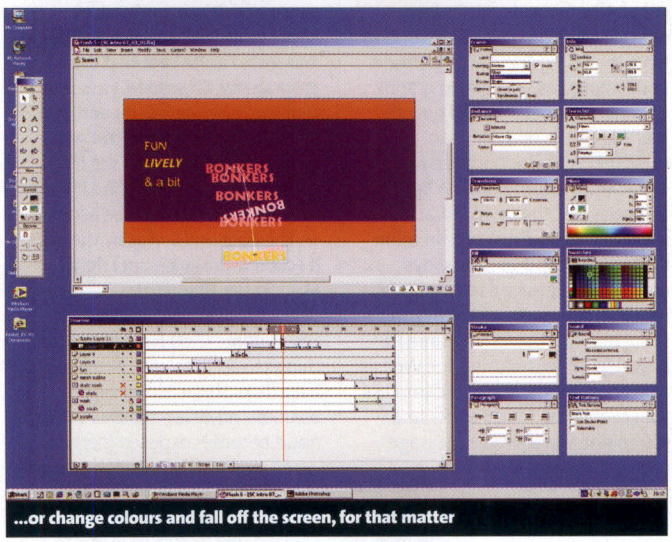
Swish: text and image manipulation is easy to understand and highly effective

If all you want to do is create simple text effects on your site, then Flax (*www.flaxfx.com*) is probably your best bet. It may not be as flexible as Swish, but the end results are extremely impressive and, most important of all, it's exceptionally easy to use. The only real drawback to Flax is that it only works with about 10 standard Windows fonts, whereas Swish works with any Truetype font.

SWfx (*www.wildform.com*) is another popular text-only Flash animation program. On the face of it, SWfx has a huge range of effects (over 200), but many of them do look somewhat similar. We did, however, like the funky interface (designed in Flash itself) and its ease of use. Visit the SWfx site to try out the demo version and you'll find a whole load of neat extra effects awaiting download, too.



Flash animation takes words and makes them move across the screen...



...or change colours and fall off the screen, for that matter

circumference, stroke width (the size of the outline) and the fill colour.

But Flash comes with its own set of drawing tools, so why not use them? Chris is unequivocal on the matter: 'Flash does have limited drawing tools and they can be used to create quite complex shapes, but Illustrator or Freehand is far better for doing that.'

People new to Flash try to create whole movies in it

UP AND RUNNING

With Sarah's site, the next step was to assemble all the disparate elements of the end animation in Flash. It's during this process that full-blown animation skills come to the fore, because Flash is a timeline-based program capable of surprisingly sophisticated effects.

Chris started off the process by importing all the different objects into Flash and assigning each of them a spot on the timeline. It's at this point that the first sequences of animation start to appear, using Flash's motion-tweening feature. This enables you to set a start and an end point for an object (be it a graphic or a piece of text) and have Flash create all the points the object must pass through from beginning to end. It's a serious time saver.

'Once we've done all that we'll begin testing it, to see how it's running through,' says Chris. 'Then we all get together again as a team and rip it apart, slag it off, see how it can be improved until we get what we want.' The end result is an animation that flows like a mini-cartoon, but is clearly and logically thought through. You can see the end result on the official Sarah Cawood Web site.

SEE FOR YOURSELF AT

www.sarahcawood.net

Keep checking back for the latest developments

HOW OTHER SITES DO IT

EXTREMELY FLASH»

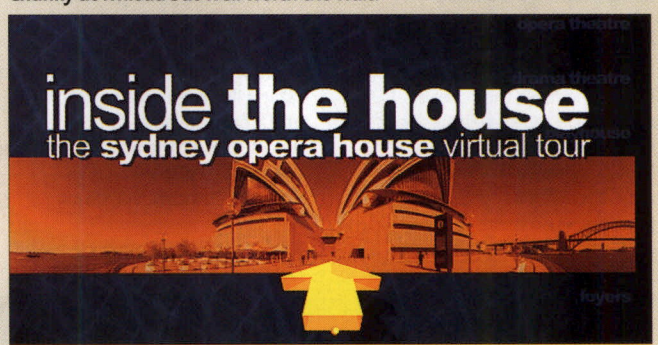
BALTHASER STUDIOS ***www.balthaser.com***

Simply staggering use of Flash by this Web design company.

INSIDE THE HOUSE

www.soh.nsw.gov.au/files/virtual_tour/vrtour.html

Chunky download but well worth the wait.



IDIOTBOXTV ***www.idiotboxtv.com***

Perfect example of why poor old HTML is looking very dull indeed.

ZANPO ***www.zanpo.com***

Online Web community with a great crisp design and some fabulous Flash

Q&A

Whether it's a glitch in your software or a problem with your ISP, our team of Net experts have the answer to hand

The sender of the month's Good Question wins a Casio TV1800 Pocket Television, worth £129.99

STOP POP-UP PIRATES

Sometimes when I'm visiting a Web site, a new browser window or three pops up. If I try and close that one, a new one appears in its place. It got to the stage quite recently where I had to hit the reset button on my PC because I had 35 windows open. Is there any cure for this virus-like plague?
SIMON TROTTER, LEICESTER

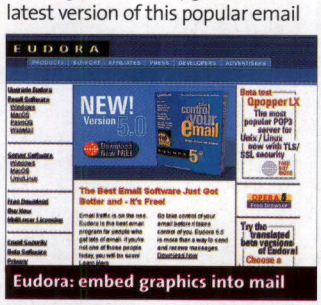
Software engineers are people just like you and me. They have their hopes and fears, their dreams, their problems – and sometimes they turn to the dark side. These incredibly annoying pop-up windows are what happens when programmers use their skills for evil: rather than sit down and write some code that speeds up the Internet or helps mankind, they've come up with scripts designed solely to bombard you with ads.

You'll find this happening when you've been tempted onto dodgy commercial sites, typically promising free loans or naughty pictures (or sometimes perfectly normal sites which consider it 'clever' to open boxes all over the place) and you're right – sometimes it's easier to surrender than try and keep up with the stream of new windows. Don't forcibly restart your PC unless you have to, however; that can cause all sorts of problems. Try to exit your browser software first, by pressing control-alt-delete. Incidentally, no-one in the history of the universe has ever bought anything through one of those wretched pop-ups, so why they persist in creating them is a complete mystery.

CAN I SEND SNAPS?

I use Eudora 4.3 and would like to send emails in 'Web page' format, with embedded graphics. Is this possible in Eudora, and if so how do I start? I've tried pasting the HTML into a new message but this obviously isn't the way to do it. Any suggestions please?
KATHRYN PERKINS, VIA EMAIL

You might need to upgrade to the latest version of this popular email



Eudora: embed graphics into mail

package, Eudora 5.0. To quote from the software's site: 'In addition to standard, enriched text, Eudora offers HTML-styled text as an option from the Styled Text Settings. Insert horizontal rules, embedded graphics, underlined hyperlinks and bulleted lists within the body of your message.' Which sounds like just what you're looking for. The 'light' version is free to download, at ***www.eudora.com***. Just bear in mind that some people aren't always delighted to receive dandy, graphics-heavy emails, as they eat up storage space and can take a long time to download. If you're using the Web as a business tool, it might not impress your clients too much, either, and you might find a simple message does the trick better at first.

If you've got your own site, the 'polite' way to send someone a fancy message is to create it as a unique page on your site and then simply email your recipient a link to it. That'll help keep the Internet uncluttered and probably give your message more impact at the same time. Job done.

Adobe: generously offering free tasters of Photoshop 5.0, plus a non-save 5.5 version

I FOUGHT THE LAW

The other day I went looking for a demo of the latest version of Photoshop. I did a search in Google and found a site that had the full program for download. I assume that this is an illegal site and that the software is pirated, but what would really happen to me if I downloaded the file? I find it hard to believe there would be a knock on the door and a visit by the police if I clicked the link – am I right?
MIKE FOLEY, BRIGHTON

You're right – Plod have got better things to do than scan a million PC hard disks. If you're running a business, however, and this software fraud becomes exposed (perhaps when you need to take the machine in for repair), an organisation like FACT (Federation Against Copyright Theft) might decide to make an example of you and bring a prosecution. But if you're a home user, this is really a matter for you and your conscience.

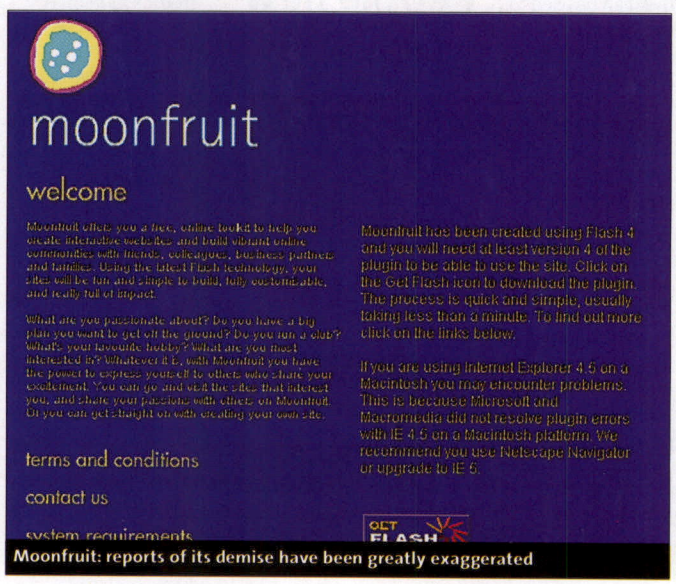
Bear in mind that every illegal copy bumps up the price of the next

Q&A GOOD QUESTION

NOT THE ONLY FRUIT

I bought *the net* for the first time in March. The decision was prompted by the article 'Build a pro site in 30 minutes'. I am anxious to have a Web site up and running as soon as possible for my local sports club, but imagine my dismay when it appears the Moonfruit site is no longer available. Is this the case or has there been a temporary malfunction? Can you recommend another site (for novices) I can use? Thanks for your help.
JOHN HEALD, VIA EMAIL

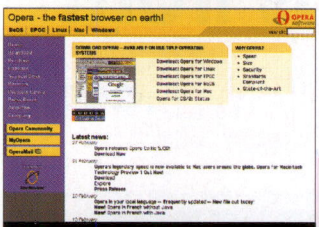
Moonfruit's certainly still in business although the site recently had some compatibility problems with Netscape users, which might explain your difficulties in accessing the service. All's well in the garden now, however: check out ***www.moonfruit.com*** for yourself. Of course, there are plenty of other sites offering similar services to Moonfruit. Two of the biggest are Tripod (***www.tripod.co.uk***) and FortuneCity (***www.fortunecity.co.uk***), each offering free site hosting, 100Mb of Web space (which should be more than enough for a novice) and customised design tools – Tripod even claims you can create your first page in one minute. Another US site you might want to consider is ZyWeb (***www.zyweb.com***); this one doesn't come free, but for around £50 a year you'll get some nifty features, like 100 pre-designed templates and some clever email tools. They offer a 30-day free trial.



Moonfruit: reports of its demise have been greatly exaggerated

version of the software, and might even cause the company to go bust; that someone, somewhere, is either making money or causing mischief from this; and that your pirate copy won't come with documentation, support or an upgrade path. Either way, it's basic theft – not nice.

On a lighter note, this free software might be legit. Many companies allow free downloads of old versions of their products in the hope you'll like it so much you'll shell out for the latest model, or offer cut-down, 'light' programs as tasters. For example, the maker of Photoshop, Adobe, is offering version 5.0 as a download, and a non-save version of Photoshop 5.5 (***www.adobe.co.uk***).



Opera: supports Explorer favourites

BROWSER WARS

It's quite recently that I discovered there were in fact browsers other than Internet Explorer out there. I particularly like Opera and have decided to use this as my main Web browser. However, I have a small problem with this otherwise excellent program that I'm hoping you can solve. I have about 300 favourite sites bookmarked in Internet Explorer and I'd like to transfer them to Opera 5. Is there a simple way of doing it, as I don't relish doing it by hand?
STEWART THOMAS, DUNDEE

Don't panic! One solution is to upload your favourites to a Web page – useful if you travel around, because you can always get to them from any machine or Internet café. Take a look at ***www.favoritesanywhere.com*** and see if you like the idea. More to the point, the latest version of Opera, 5.0, fully supports Explorer favourites – and it's free. For more information see the browser's Web site: ***www.opera.com***.

ON THE BOX

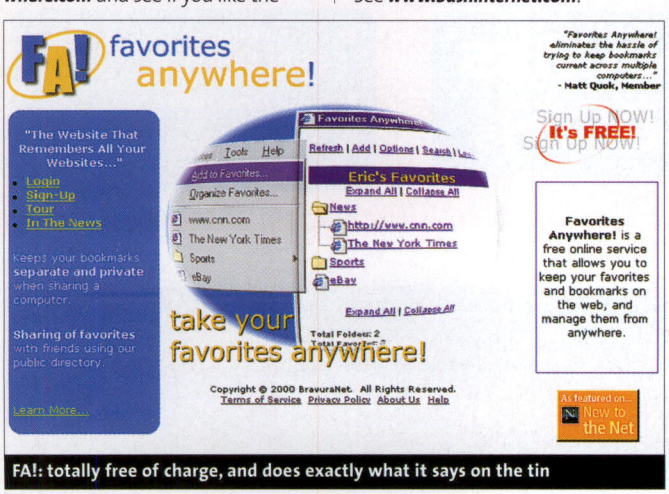
I have quite a simple question: rather than buy a bigger monitor for playing games etc, is there a program or connection I can use to wire my computer into my TV set, which is about the size I'm after? Alternatively, is there a desk monitor I can use for my PC on which I can also receive signals?
ANDREW DEMPSTER, CAMBRIDGE

The sad fact is that computer monitors work at far higher resolutions than TV sets: that's why a 21-inch monitor costs three times as much as a TV screen the same size. If you don't believe us, sit as close to your TV set as you do to your computer screen and observe how 'fuzzy' everything is.

There are hardware fixes that feed your computer's signal into your TV – ask at an electrical store for a computer-to-video tuner – but the inevitable loss of quality makes this an inefficient solution for games players. On the bright side, your computer monitor will happily display a TV signal.

You'll need to buy and install a PC/TV card, which start from around £80. Shell out for one of the more expensive cards and you can turn your computer into the equivalent of a Thomson Tivo, storing video directly onto your hard disk (which will need to be pretty big). Of course, you'll need to have your computer running whenever you want to watch TV, so it's not the most practical of solutions.

Plus, of course, there's always the oft-mentioned Bush Internet TV, which for a reasonable £200 gives you a decent connection on a telly – but sadly, it doesn't play games yet. See ***www.bushinternet.com***.



FA!: totally free of charge, and does exactly what it says on the tin

QUICK QUESTION TIME. FINGERS ON THE BUZZERS...

FAQs

>Why does the delivery time of email vary so much? Sometimes I get an email literally within seconds of it being sent and sometimes it takes hours. Is this the 'Net congestion' I hear so much about?
HOWARD BYERS, STOCKPORT

Much like snail-mail, email isn't delivered door-to-door; it goes down a complicated path through the equivalent of sorting offices, depots and mail trains. When you send a message, it's received by your email server and sits there for a while. After a time – it might be 10 seconds, it might be an hour – the server dumps all the messages it's been storing onto the Internet, from where they take long, convoluted journeys around dozens of routers until they finally get to another email server – this time, the one that's used by your recipient. And eventually (again, it could be hours) that server will spit your hilarious knock-knock joke at the person you intended it for. If you're lucky, your message will arrive at its various servers just as they're ready to exchange messages with the Net, and your mail flies through; if you're unlucky, or if a server has gone offline, or there's Net congestion caused by a billion spurious Anna Kournikova mails, the process can take days.

>My friend told me that the Consumers Association/*Which?* had set up some sort of safe shopping system. What is this and where can I find a list of sites that *Which?* approves?
CLAIRE DUNN, SHREWSBURY

Which? magazine has grabbed the high ground in online consumer protection, and its Web Trader scheme is the leading one of its kind in the UK. Web Traders agree to meet and abide by the *Which?* code of practice, which is stringent enough to put the most reluctant online shopper's mind at rest. You'll find more details at the official site, ***www.which.net/webtrader***, as well as a list of British members, a forum where you can discuss your experiences shopping on member sites, and a run-down of international affiliate schemes; extremely useful if you're thinking of buying something from abroad.

Which?: on hand to help with online shopping

>When I'm in certain Web sites and try to print off pages, the right hand side of the page is missing. How can I correct this?
DW, VIA EMAIL

This problem is less to do with the sites you're looking at than the way you sending the pages down to the printer. Check the 'page setup' or 'print' commands in your browser software; there'll be an option to resize pages so they fit onto A4 paper, or 'tile' them to print over multiple pages. Alternatively, highlight, copy and paste the information you're aiming to print into a Word document, then print that out. It's not as pretty, but it is much faster.

>I'd like to receive faxes through my computer. I only have one telephone line, so can you advise me on the simplest way to do this?
MALCOLM WINTHER, VIA EMAIL

Fax technology has been around for years, and is designed to work at very much lower transmission speeds than this new-fangled Internet thing, so the good news is that modern modems can both send and receive faxes with ease. If you've yet to buy your modem or computer, make sure it comes bundled with the relevant software, as will almost certainly be the case. Alternatively, you can download free software. Just search for 'fax' at a site like Tucows (***www.tucows.com***) for dozens of examples. If you've got just the one phone line, you won't be able to fax and stay online (or talk to people) at the same time, so if you're a BT customer you might want to 'double up' with a line-splitter; bear in mind this will severely cut down the speed with which you access the Web. And of course, to receive faxes at any time, you'll need to keep your computer running all the time, both night and day.

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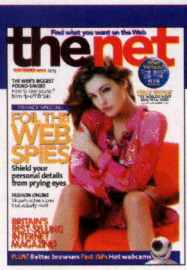

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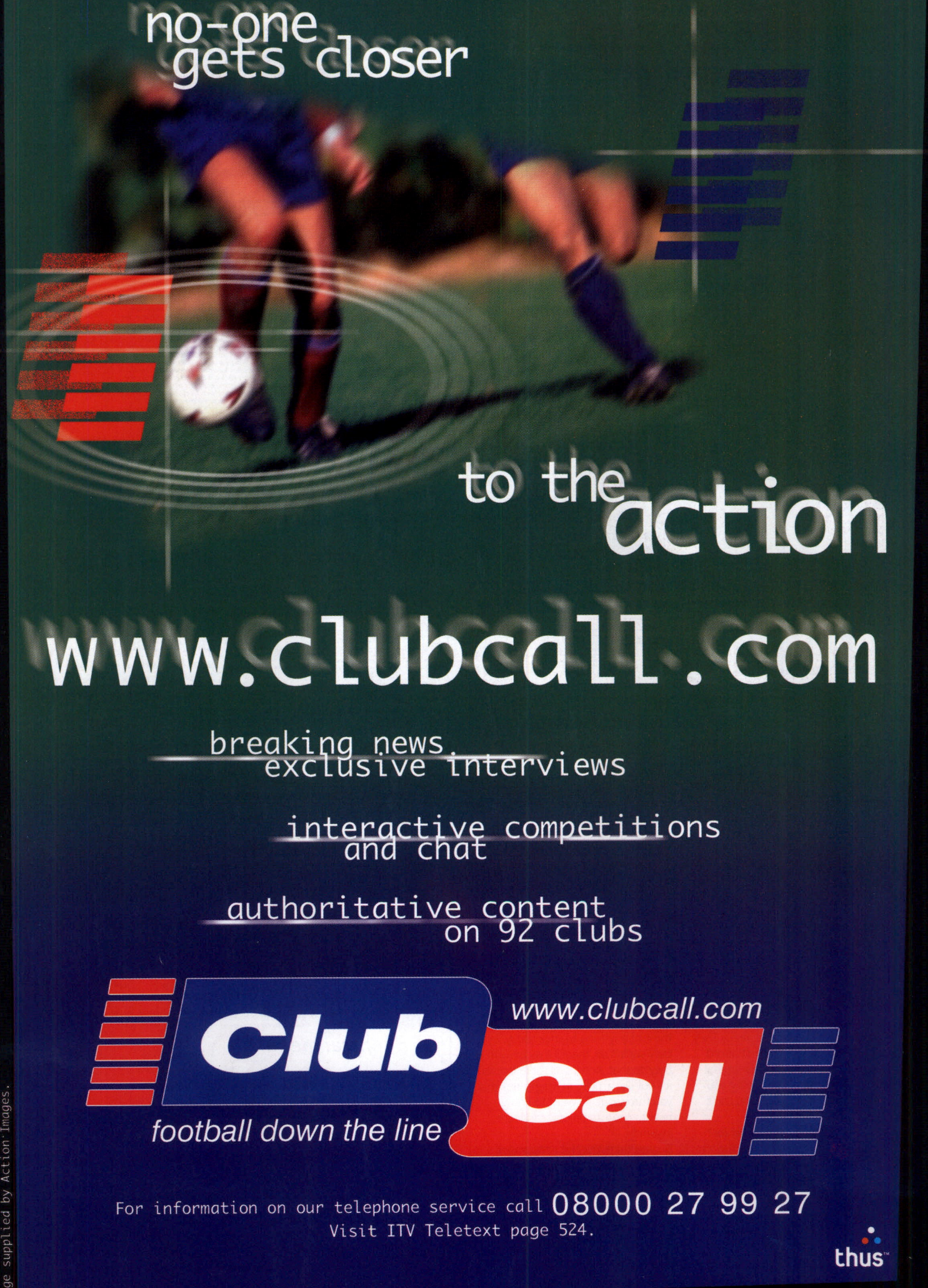

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:// Famous fans of the Web tell all

INTERVIEW: GARY PARKINSON; PICTURE: PA

Delia Smith

She knows how to boil an egg – but what does Britain's favourite chef know about the Net?

So what's DeliaOnline all about?
It's going to be the best food Web site in the world. We've been working very hard for 18 months and we're not expecting to achieve it overnight, but we're going to continue to build it into the best.

What's the perfect 'recipe' for a good Web site?
I think it's that somebody really cares about it, that it's being continually updated with new ideas and that you build a community of people that understand its value. We're definitely aiming to build a community.

When did you discover the Internet?
It was on the advice of friends with more Internet experience, really. They were saying 'Delia, you can't afford not to do this: with all the material you have and all the following you have, it's something that you can't really ignore any longer'.

What do you use the Internet for?
I suppose really the site I use the most is the Norwich City site. It's lovely to keep up with what all the supporters are saying. I'm not normally a huge user of the Web myself, simply because I've got to work! But I must say we used it when we went on holiday; we looked up the Telegraph. It's wonderful that you can log in and find the daily news when you're on holiday in another country. I also use the Net to get hold of books, that's a major use.

Will you be doing Web chats?
Yes, we're going to do a weekly chat to start with, then I want to do another weekly one for children only. Will I have a Webcam in my kitchen? Probably, yes. My dream is to explain a new recipe each week live.

What's the advantage of the Net to a cook?
At the moment we're getting a lot of feedback that a lot of people just want ideas. They think 'Oh God I can't think of anything to cook today,' but they switch on, there's a recipe and they do that. And it's all there forever: it's not like articles in magazines that you throw out. If I want to know how to chop an onion, I can learn instantly.

Do you think the Net encourages people to cook? Or does it just encourage them to order pizza?
It's both. You get people who want to cook and people who don't: those who don't will order pizzas, people who do will get all the information they need and a lot of pleasure.

DELIA'S PICK OF THE WEB

DELIAONLINE ***www.deliaonline.com***
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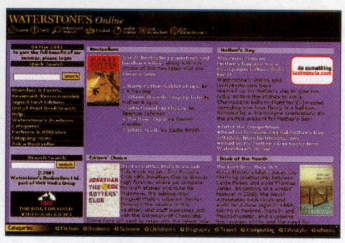

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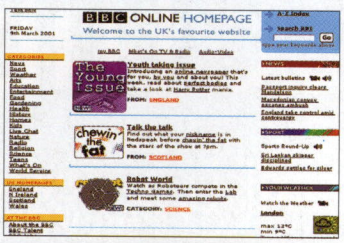

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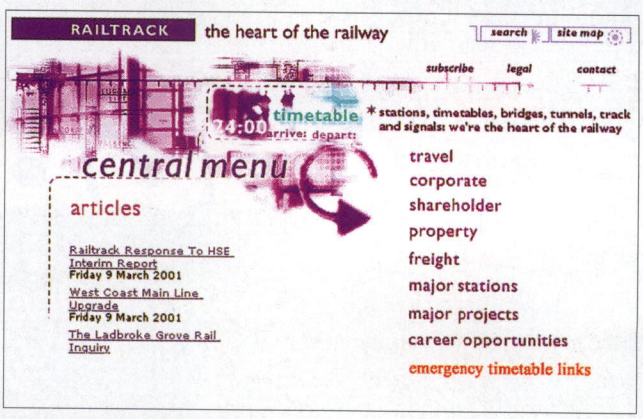

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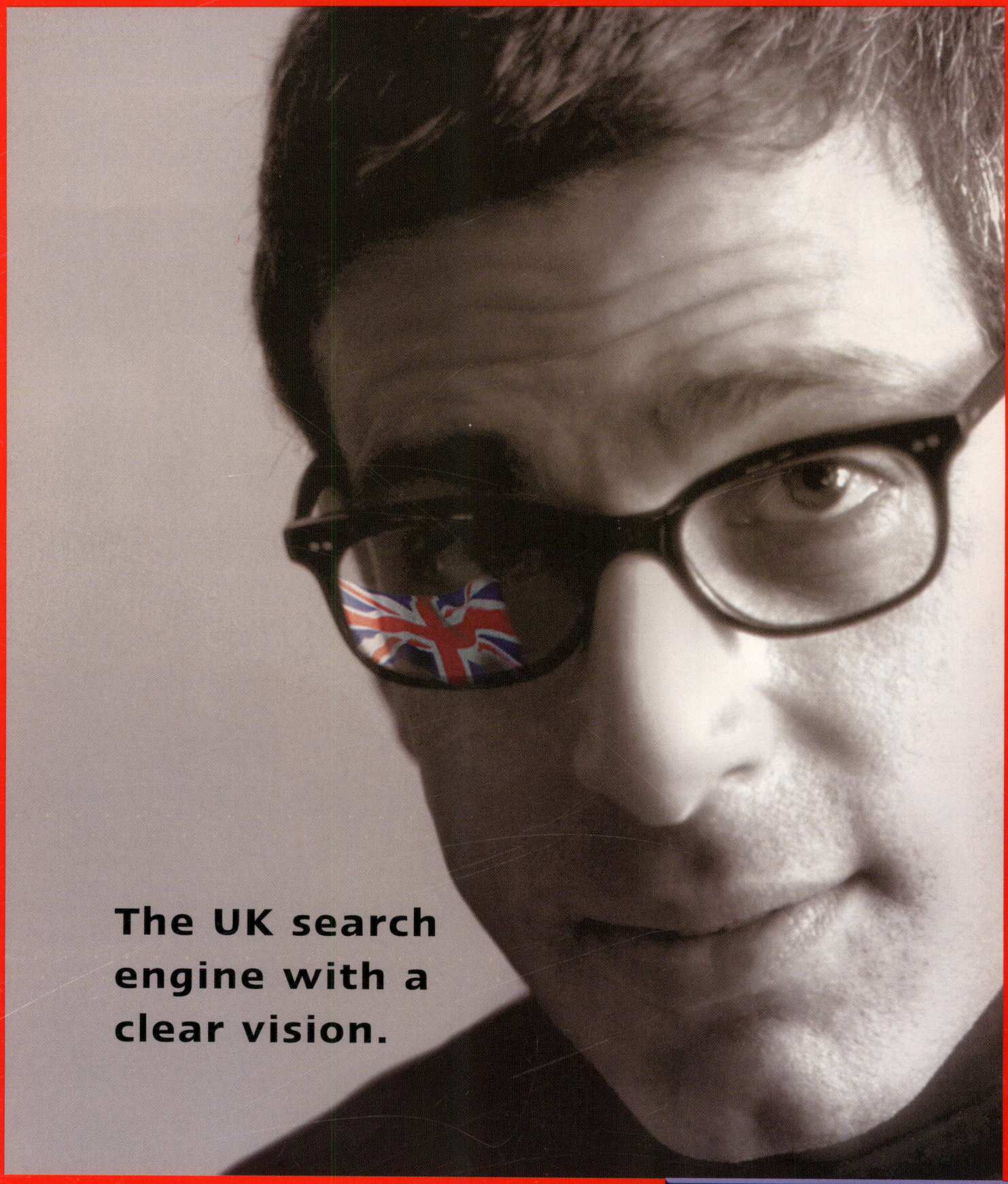

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